

# 2020 Annual Report

Visit North Carolina  
A Part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

The mission of Visit North Carolina, a part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, is to unify and lead the state in positioning North Carolina as a preferred destination for travelers and film production and in maximizing economic vitality statewide.

## **Table of Contents**

NC Travel and Tourism Board	3
EDPNC Introduction	5
2020: The Year in Review	5
2020 Results	8
Visit North Carolina Budget Overview	9
NC Visitor Services Budget Overview	10
State Tourism Office Budgets	11
COVID-19 Recovery Marketing and Tourism Advertising	12
VisitNC.com	17
In-State Marketing Initiatives	20
Public Relations	21
Visitor Services	22
Publications	23
Domestic Marketing	24
International Marketing	25
Tourism Development	28
Industry Relations	32
North Carolina Film Office	33

## **2020 NC Travel and Tourism Board**

*Listed here is the Board for the year 2020 as required for the 2020 Annual Report. For information on the current board, please go to <https://partners.visitnc.com/travel-tourism-board-1>.*

### **Sally Ashworth**

Visit Lake Norman

Appointed By: Speaker of the House

### **Rolf Blizzard**

Turnpike Properties

Appointed By: NC Travel & Tourism Coalition

### **Stephanie Brown - appointed December 2018**

Explore Asheville

Appointed By: Speaker of the House

### **Mike Butts, Chair - June 2018 to current**

Visit Charlotte

Appointed By: NCTIA

### **Christopher Chung**

Economic Development Partnership of NC

Appointed By: Economic Development Partnership of NC

### **Secretary Anthony Copeland**

NC Department of Commerce

Appointed By: NC Department of Commerce

### **Kevin Corbin**

North Carolina House of Representatives

Appointed By: Speaker of the House

### **Sen. Chuck Edwards - appointed December 2018**

North Carolina Senate

Appointed By: Senate President Pro Tempore

### **Jonathan Fussell - appointed December 2018**

Duplin Winery

Appointed By: Senate President Pro Tempore

### **Rep. Holly Grange - appointed December 2018**

North Carolina House of Representatives

Appointed By: Speaker of the House

### **Lynn Minges- appointed August 2019**

NC Restaurant & Lodging Association

Appointed By: NCRLA - Lodging

### **Sen. Rick Gunn - appointed December 2018**

North Carolina Senate

Appointed By: Senate President Pro Tempore

**Mike Hawkins**

Pisgah Enterprise

Appointed By: Economic Development Partnership

Lee Nettles - appointed August 2019

Outer Banks Visitors Bureau

Appointed By: DMANC

**Richard Moore**

Timm's Furniture

Appointed By: Governor

**Joe Pierce**

Charlotte Hornets

Appointed By: Governor

Sharon Sexton - appointed December 2018

Caswell County Chamber of Commerce

Appointed By: Senate President Pro Tempore

**Jim Beley** – appointed August 2019

The Umstead Hotel & Spa

Appointed By: NCRLA - Restaurant

**Billy Traurig**

Carolina Hurricanes

Appointed By: NC T&T Coalition

## **Visit North Carolina a part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina**

*October 2014 marked the transition to the nonprofit corporation known as the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC). The EDPNC was created to partner with the North Carolina Department of Commerce in consolidating and enhancing North Carolina's marketing and recruitment functions, previously conducted by the N.C. Department of Commerce. The partnership serves to oversee efforts in business recruitment and development, international trade, and tourism, film and sports development. As part of this transition, the Department of Commerce's Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development is currently referred to and doing business as "Visit North Carolina."*

### **2020: The Year in Review**

Not surprisingly, North Carolina's tourism industry took a hit in 2020, with estimated visitor spending at \$20 billion in direct spending, a 32 percent decrease from 2019. Spending by travelers directly supported more than 178,000 jobs for North Carolinians, a decrease of 26 percent from 2019. Payroll income generated more than \$6.4 billion. Visitor spending generated nearly \$1.8 billion in state and local tax revenues for reinvestment in communities all across North Carolina, a decrease of 24 percent from 2019.  
*Source: U.S. Travel Association, Tourism Economics*

Partnerships with destinations, attractions, lodging and dining properties and associations statewide remain key to North Carolina's success. Despite losing spending during the pandemic, the state actually gained market share of visitors. Effective collaboration within the tourism industry contributed to North Carolina increasing its position in terms of market share of domestic visitors to become the nation's fifth most-visited state in 2020 after being the sixth most-visited for more than a decade.

*Source: OmniTrak TravelTrakAmerica*

### **Program Highlights for 2020**

Employment generated by travelers in North Carolina decreased 26 percent in 2020. While these travel-related jobs comprised 6 percent of total non-agricultural employment in North Carolina prior to the pandemic, the tourism industry statewide lost over half of its jobs in March and April 2020, restored or created about 62,000 tourism jobs between April and October 2020, but then lost about 6,000 jobs from November through the end of the year.

*Source: U.S. Travel Association, Tourism Economics*

On an average day in 2020, visitors in North Carolina spent more than \$54 million and contributed more than \$4.9 million in state and local taxes.

*Source: U.S. Travel Association, Tourism Economics*

Visit NC was an early adopter of Arrivalist, a location-based attribution tool that tracks digital advertising exposures and then corresponding arrivals to the state. Visit NC's owned digital and paid digital media in 2020 generated a 56.6 percent Arrival Lift. This means those who saw Visit NC's owned and paid digital media have a 56.6 percent higher arrival rate to the state than a similar audience who didn't see our digital media but came on their own.

## COVID-19 Recovery Focus

As federal, state and local government agencies addressed public health and safety concerns, the travel and hospitality economy was effectively shut down for an extended period in 2020. As a result, Visit NC paused its award-winning Firsts That Last marketing campaign and quickly shifted its efforts from inspiring travel to a concerted effort to assist partners and allies in all 100 counties respond to the unprecedented challenges. With a laser focus on its mission and responsibility to unify and lead North Carolina's tourism industry, a resolute and nimble Visit NC team responded in full force with a strategic, comprehensive communications and marketing effort to return North Carolina's vital travel economy in a safe and responsible manner.

Visit NC's proactive and creative recovery initiatives in earned the admiration of the 12-state **Southeast Tourism Society** garnering the organization's **Shining Example Award as State Tourism Office of the Year** for 2020. Highlights of those efforts, covered in more detail later in this report, included:

- Expanded research initiatives to inform and help Visit NC and its partners shape recovery efforts.
- Extensive and frequent outreach and communication with industry partners in all 100 counties such as regularly scheduled regional listening tours and held virtually, as was the Visit NC Webinar Series of 23 sessions, all intended to keep partners well informed and better equipped to lead recovery within their own communities.
- Creating **Cook It Forward NC**, a grassroots effort in collaboration with the NC Restaurant and Lodging Association to support the state's hospitality and unemployed workers.
- Crafting **Count On Me NC**, a \$10 million bilingual public safety initiative and mutual pledge empowering customers and businesses to help keep everyone safe – a partnership with the NC Restaurant and Lodging Association, NC Dept. of Health and Human Services and NC State Extension.
- Complementing and extending exposure for Count On Me NC, Visit NC executed a \$5 million marketing credit program helping 130 partners amplify safe messaging for their destinations within 39 co-op advertising programs.
- Working in tandem with the NC Travel Industry Association, the Visit NC team also administered \$1.5 million in partner marketing grants benefiting 82 different organizations including 56 counties within the state's more economically distressed Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties.
- With interest in, and impact on, the outdoors reaching new heights during the pandemic, Visit NC launched Outdoor NC, a partnership with the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and the NC Outdoor Recreation Industry Office to educate visitors and residents on appropriate behavior for natural spaces.
- Proactive public relations efforts expanded Visit NC's outreach to key audiences with a program that generated more than 2.2 billion consumer impressions across the United States and internationally during 2020 with coverage representing 37 counties, 23 of which were classified as Tier 1 or 2.

Like many, the state's film industry was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Production in the state—and around the world---came to a complete standstill; however, North Carolina was one of the first states to restart production as work began to resume. In all, 2020 saw productions have a direct in-state spend in excess \$101 million while creating more than 9,000 job opportunities in the state, including 1,400 well-paying crew positions and 420 talent jobs. Among the 2020 highlights were the filming of the Seasons 1 of both *Delilah* and *Welcome to Flatch*, Season 2 of the newly relocated series *Hightown*, the feature-length film *Scream* and two made-for-tv movies, *USS Christmas* and *A Nashville Christmas Carol*.

Visit NC continues to partner with the North Carolina Sports Association to help attract sporting events to small and large communities. During the pandemic, the Visit NC team focused on enhancing its marketing toolbox including the launch of a new sportsnc.com website to be better positioned as sports rights holders became active in planning and conducting sporting events again.

Tourism development outreach in small communities was strengthened through several initiatives, including an ongoing partnership with the NC Department of Commerce and NC Department of Natural & Cultural Resources on efforts including Cultural Heritage Tourism Development and Blue Ridge Music Trails. We also continued to maintain partner participation in the NC Certified Retirement Communities Program.

Please review the balance of this Annual Report for more details on Visit NC's 2020 program of work and accomplishments. Visit North Carolina continues to collaborate with partners statewide to ensure North Carolina's continued success and growth as a preferred travel, film and sports destination and positive economic force for the entire state.

## **2020 Results**

### **Visitor Spending**

In 2020, it is estimated that visitors to North Carolina spent \$19.96 billion in the state, a decrease of 31.7 percent from 2019. Visitor spending directly supported 178,700 jobs for North Carolina residents and the tourism industry directly contributed \$6.4 billion to the state's payroll in 2020.

Traveler spending generated \$3.0 billion in federal, state and local tax receipts, a decrease of 26.6 percent from 2019.

*Source: U.S. Travel Association, Tourism Economics*

### **2020 Travel Volume**

North Carolina person-trip volume was 37.2 million in 2020, ranking North Carolina No. 5 in total domestic person-trip volume.

*Source: Omnitrak*

### **2020 Total State Rankings by Volume**

1. California
2. Florida
3. Texas
4. New York
- 5. North Carolina**
6. Georgia
7. Arizona
8. Pennsylvania
9. Michigan
10. Tennessee

*Source: Omnitrak*

### **Average Trip Spending**

North Carolina overnight visitor parties spent approximately \$603 per trip in 2020. Out-of-state visitors spent approximately \$714 per trip in 2020, while in-state resident travel parties spent \$435 per trip on average. This represents a 49 percent difference in average per trip among resident visitors traveling within the state and out-of-state visitor parties.

U.S. travel parties on average spent \$550 per trip in 2020.

*Source: Omnitrak*

### **Average Overnight Trip Duration**

The average length of stay of North Carolina visitors was 3.6 nights in 2020. Resident visitors stayed an average of 2.8 nights, while out-of-state visitors stayed an average of 4.1 nights.

U.S. travelers stayed an average of 3.5 nights per trip in 2020.

*Source: Omnitrak*



## North Carolina's Top States of Origin for Overnight Visitors

- NC 46%
- VA 9%
- SC 8%
- FL 5%
- TN 4%
- GA 4%
- NY 3%
- PA 2%
- MD 2%
- OH 2%
- CA 1%

Source: Omnitrak

## NC's Activities for Overnight Visitors

Research shows overnight visitors to North Carolina participate in a wide variety of activities, further emphasizing the diversity of the tourism product in the state.

While visiting friends and relatives and shopping are routinely mentioned every year among all travelers, in 2020 exploring the state's scenic beauty, state and national parks, and rich cultural assets were among the most popular specific activities surveyed. The proportion of visitors who took part in activities such as hiking, backpacking, visiting national parks, rock climbing, wildlife viewing and other nature activities increased in 2020.

Source: Omnitrak

## Visit North Carolina Budget Overview

Marketing Media Purchase & Production	\$6,748,813
Personnel & Administration	\$1,256,655
Rent, Facilities and Computers (tech and licensing)	\$274,067
VisitNC.com Dev. & Maintenance (Interactive)	\$885,000
International Marketing (Canada, Germany, UK)	\$815,520
Film Office Marketing	\$280,680
Public Relations	\$441,645
Domestic Sales Promotion (Group and Sports)	\$102,075
RetireNC and Industry Relations	\$117,700
Research	\$499,328
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$11,421,483</b>

## North Carolina Visitor Services Budget Overview

The Visitor Services function remains part of the North Carolina Department of Commerce and was funded by appropriations from the General Assembly. Visitor Services, comprised of the State's nine Welcome Centers, the Tourism Call Center and the Tourism Warehouse, is staffed by about 48 FTEs annually. The Call Center operates in partnership with the NC Departments of Public Safety, Transportation, and Agriculture and Consumer Services. Appropriations included:

Welcome Centers	\$2,151,414
Inquiry/Fulfillment	378,922
<hr/>	
Total	\$2,530,336

## State Tourism Office Budgets: 2020-21

North Carolina's budget of approximately \$11.4 million ranked among the lowest among southern state tourism office budgets in 2020-21, significantly behind several states that are direct competitors. North Carolina's core tourism promotion budget remained flat for the third year.

State	Projected 2020-21 Budget	Number of FTE staff
South Carolina	35,413,000	15
Louisiana	26,600,000	25
West Virginia	25,500,000	19
Virginia	25,000,000	61
Alabama	24,400,000	28
Arkansas	22,500,000	19
Tennessee	14,500,000	34
North Carolina	11,400,000	13
Georgia	10,000,000	20

*\*Budgets and staffing are estimates provided by State Tourism Directors to Travel South USA and do not include Welcome Center staff.*

## **Visit North Carolina's COVID-19 Recovery Initiatives for North Carolina's Travel Industry**

North Carolina's travel industry was not immune to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically the nation's sixth most visited state, North Carolina quickly found itself ranking sixth in the rise of jobless claims during spring 2020. As was true across the US and globe, the travel and hospitality sectors suffered the greatest job losses. Progress toward recovery within North Carolina's \$29 billion tourism economy would start with changing consumer behavior by encouraging adoption of recommended safety protocols.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a crisis destination marketing organizations across the state never imagined. Recognizing the disruption and uncertainty stay at home orders, closings, cancellations, staff layoffs and more were causing, the Visit NC team began by dividing up its list of partner cell numbers and proactively making personal contact with every local tourism office in the state to connect, inform and identify the most valuable areas of support Visit NC could provide each partner. Many partners were struggling to even find time to ask for help, and in many instances, weren't sure what to ask for or what kind of assistance might be available. The insights gained from this outreach and consistent communication with a very appreciative partner base helped Visit NC smartly and rapidly shape its multi-faceted recovery efforts and tailor assistance appropriately.

Throughout the recovery efforts, Visit NC's pillars of consumer understanding; diversity, equity and inclusion; sustainability; partnership; and accountability have remained in evidence every step of the way.

### **Leading Recovery, Delivering Value**

Visit NC's pandemic response and recovery efforts for North Carolina's tourism industry were proactive, comprehensive and creative, including these representative highlights:

**Expanded research initiatives** to gain critical and timely insights informing Visit NC's efforts and those of travel industry partners in all 100 counties. A better understanding of the shifts in consumer sentiment helped guide Visit NC's communications strategies and messaging and set the course for navigating through the pandemic as smartly and effectively as possible.

**Maintaining and strengthening communications with industry partners** statewide was paramount for our office to lead during the pandemic. While weekly NewsLink eBlasts, travel advisories, Travel & Tourism Board meetings and listening tours continued (albeit virtual), the team conducted the **Visit NC Webinar Series**, 23 sessions keeping partners informed and better equipped to lead recovery within their own communities. Recordings were made available to those unable to participate on Visit NC's Industry YouTube page and through [partners.visitnc.com](https://partners.visitnc.com).

### **2020 Recovery Webinars**

- March 26 NC Tourism Amid COVID-19
- April 1 Crisis Research and Communications During COVID-19
- April 8 Visit NC Co-op Marketing
- April 15 Shifts in Social Media Strategies During COVID-19
- April 22 NC Legislative Update

April 29 Research Insights into American Traveler and NC Lodging  
May 6 Marketing –The Art of Making Things Happen  
May 20 The Road to Recovery & Count On Me NC Public Safety Initiative  
June 4 Leveraging Mobile Location Data to Measure Consumer Behavior  
June 17 Visit NC Update –Traveling Through the Pandemic  
June 24 A Conversation on Diversity in the Tourism Industry  
July 1 Safety, Sentiment and Stewardship  
July 15 Moving Forward in the New Normal  
July 29 What’s Happening on Capitol Hill (DC) and on Jones Street (Raleigh)  
Aug 12 New Commerce Grant Program and Count On Me NC/Toolkit Updates  
Aug 26 COVID-19 Marketing and Funding Update  
Sept 2 Visit NC Stimulus Marketing Program Offerings  
Sept 16 COVID-19 Relief Update  
Sept 30 Hosting Safe Events & Festivals  
Oct 21 Mortgage, Utility and Relief Program & Tourism Promotion Grants Update  
Nov 4 Moving Forward in a Virtual World  
Nov 10 Grant Reporting Guidance for the Pandemic Recovery Office  
Nov 18 Count On Me NC, Consumer Sentiment and Film Office Updates

## **Count On Me NC**

With discretionary travel essentially shut down, Visit NC shifted from inspiring and attracting potential visitors to a public safety initiative designed to increase resident and traveler confidence in engaging in dining, hospitality and travel activities. Count On Me NC was launched in spring 2020 in collaboration with the **NC Restaurant and Lodging Association, NC Department of Health and Human Services** and **NC State University** to demonstrate businesses’ commitment to COVID-19 safety measures while also inspiring consumer commitment to do the same.

Initially designed for restaurants and foodservice establishments by NC State’s nationally recognized food safety specialists, training modules were also made available for other businesses including hotels, attractions and retailers. By completing the training and taking the Count On Me NC pledge, businesses and consumers were showing they were doing their part, and by everyone doing their part, we would all get back to what we love to do sooner.

Crafting Count On Me NC, a **\$10 million bilingual public safety initiative** and mutual pledge empowering consumers and businesses to help keep everyone safe and protected. During the campaign we continued to engage with the NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC State and the NC Restaurant and Lodging Association to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the program.

Over the course of July – December 2020, various high-touch media channels were leveraged to increase reach and awareness on Count On Me NC messaging including digital; TV; Out-Of-Home advertising; print; and custom consumer promotional activities.

Visit NC also realized significant media efficiencies via investment negotiations and earned more than \$600,000 in added-value exposure through our media buying efforts.

- Digital (In-State & Contiguous) – Generated 284,575, 344 total impressions; 101,768,520 completed video views; and 522,147 total click throughs.

- TV (In-State) – Broadcast and cable schedules spanned Asheville, Charlotte, Greensboro, Greenville, Raleigh and Wilmington markets, with market reach ranging between 3.6 million – 32.8 million per DMA.
- Innovative Out of Home (In-State) elements further extended the campaign.
  - Digital OOH (NC) – 108,826,039 impressions (billboards and outdoor signage)
  - Restaurant Bathrooms (NC) – 282 venues (posters and wall clings)
  - Transit (Charlotte) – Full Light Rail wrap ran for six weeks in the state’s largest market.
- Print (In-State) – Brand and co-op inserts ran across 16 in-market publications.
- SoundCloud Contest (In-State) – Custom contest empowered SoundCloud platform creators to customize and share their own rendition of the Count On Me NC jingle, yielding 30 total remixes with the winning remix touted via paid SoundCloud media.

The Visit NC team also tapped into partnerships with a variety of brands to expand the reach and positive impact of its efforts. Among the brands collaborating with Visit NC were:

**WRAL Night of Lights holiday celebration**

- Approximately 100,000 attendees; 100 public service announcements

**International Bluegrass Music Association Festival (held virtually)**

- 467,090 Facebook/Instagram/Twitter impressions.
- 11,191 website page views.
- 548,100 YouTube impressions.
- 33,720 eBlast opens.

**Atlantic Coast Conference sports**

- 2,035,447 total social impressions across UNC, NC State and Duke.
- 245,888 UNC Newsflash eBlast opens.
- Bonus NC State men’s basketball radio announcements and coach’s show announcements.

**NASCAR** partnerships with **Richard Petty Motorsports** and **Gray Gaulding** during October 2020 events at the **Charlotte Motor Speedway**.

Collaboration with **Circle K** stores in North Carolina featured in-store Count On Me NC digital signage complemented by Count On Me NC commercials running on gas pumps through Gas Station TV.

**Rowdy Energy Drinks / Camping World Sweepstakes**

- 17,423 contest submissions.
- 5,872,186 social media impressions.
- 2,402,000 Rowdy Energy / Camping World impressions.
- 590,886 social interactions.

**Charlotte Motor Speedway Christmas**

- Approximately 259,000 attendees.

**U.S. Travel Association** “Let’s Go There” safety posts

- 15,091 social media impressions.

Among the positive results for the campaign, third party research reported 75% of NC residents were more likely to wear masks and 68% of NC residents were more likely to avoid large gatherings after exposure to the campaign.

### **Cook It Forward NC**

With tens of thousands of NC restaurant workers struggling due to the pandemic, Visit NC partnered with NC chefs in Cook It Forward NC, a challenge to share the love – and the spotlight – by promoting other chefs and their restaurants from around the state. Jumping in quickly during spring 2020, Visit NC and North Carolina’s most acclaimed chefs started a chain reaction of goodwill among all NC chefs and foodies using #CookItForwardNC. Chefs shared their favorite dish prepared by another NC chef, helping shine the light on the state’s diverse culinary offerings and rallying support for restaurant workers impacted by COVID-19. Foodies and more were encouraged to order takeout and go to [visitnc.com/cookitforwardnc](http://visitnc.com/cookitforwardnc) to donate to the **NC Restaurant Workers Relief Fund** facilitated by the NC Restaurant and Lodging Association, who reported participation doubled during the campaign.

### **Outdoor NC**

Interest in the outdoors reached new heights during the pandemic and elevated the importance of preserving North Carolina’s natural environments to ensure the use and enjoyment of the state’s much desired recreational resources for future generations. Visit NC launched Outdoor NC in collaboration with the **NC Outdoor Recreation Industry Office** and **Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics** to educate visitors and residents on appropriate behavior and care for our outdoor spaces. Initial efforts included both consumer and partner facing assets and emphasize core Leave No Trace principles tailored specifically to North Carolina. A video and social media content partnership with the Matador Network delivered 9,031,010 promotional impressions and 19,911 social media impressions for Outdoor NC messaging. Outdoor NC will remain an integral component of Visit NC’s program of work as sustainability is a core value and priority for the organization. Plans include further outreach and coordination with state agencies, industry partners and private sector allies.

### **Marketing Credit Program for NC Industry Partners**

Visit NC capitalized on **CARES Act** funds appropriated by the NC Legislature in August 2020 to create a new marketing credit initiative providing **130 local tourism offices**, representing 92 of 100 counties across the state, with \$10,000 to \$100,000 each based on their size determined by prior occupancy tax collections. Partners took advantage of a wide range of marketing, advertising and research programs crafted and implemented by the Visit NC team and its agency of record.

Visit NC offered a wide range of cost-effective Marketing Credit co-op opportunities that allowed partners to tap into various media channels based on their respective objectives and needs – print, audio, display, pre-roll, OTT/CTV, email, paid social and digital Out-Of-Home advertising. Additionally, partners had an expanded menu of other non-media offerings to leverage, including but not limited to VisitNC.com opportunities, research assistance and creative services.

#### Print Media | Fall 2020

##### Regional & National Print

- *Outside Magazine*
- *Garden & Gun*

- *Southern Living*

Local Market Combo: Large Markets

- *Atlanta Magazine*
- *Our State Magazine*
- *Philadelphia Magazine*
- *The Washington Post Magazine*

Local Market Combo: Northern Markets

- *Cleveland Magazine*
- *Columbus Monthly*
- *Nashville Lifestyles*
- *Pittsburgh Magazine*
- *Richmond Magazine*

Local Market Combo: Southern Markets

- *Charlotte Magazine*
- *Jacksonville Magazine*
- *Orlando Magazine*
- *South Carolina Living*
- *The Town*

Digital Media | October – December 2020

- Cluep
- Google / YouTube
- iHeartMedia
- Spotify
- Facebook
- S4M
- Our State
- Garden & Gun
- AARP
- AccuWeather
- Dstillery
- Cox Connected Media
- Dstillery
- GOLF
- Golf Digest

OOH Media | October – December 2020

- ProjectX

Non-Media | October – December 2020

- VisitNC.com (Various Programs)
- Arrivalist (Research)
- Meredith (Travel Safety Insert)
- Northstar (Virtual Tradeshow)
- Bill Russ (Video Production)
- Miles (Local Business Support)
- MMGY (Creative Services)
- Focus 3 + Rocket Science
- Virtual Trade+Adventure Show



## **Marketing Grant Program for NC Industry Partners**

In addition to Visit NC's marketing credit program, the NC Legislature made a \$1.5 million appropriation to help eligible local tourism offices experiencing reduced ability to market their destinations due to revenue loss. Visit NC consulted with the **NC Travel Industry Association** in distributing these incremental funds. A total of 120 grants were made to 82 organizations. Ninety-three grants were distributed to 56 counties within the state's more economically distressed Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties.

## **VisitNC.com**

### **Overview**

As the state's official travel website, VisitNC.com represents thousands of NC industry partners to millions of avid travelers seeking information to make the most of their leisure travel. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted travel to and within the state. While visits to VisitNC.com also saw a not unexpected drop, the site continued to be a valuable resource for consumers seeking current information on destinations and attractions welcoming visitors while also emphasizing appropriate protocols for visiting safely.

### **VisitNC.com 2020 Key Performance Indicators**

10,265,247 site page views  
52,264 site visitors participating in sweepstakes  
36,934 Travel Guides ordered from website  
27,998 downloads or views of virtual brochures  
2,791,985 views of story pages  
353,510 site searches performed  
16,181 clicks to view online travel publications  
1,566,391 clicks to partner websites  
26,886 clicks to view travel deals  
20,124 on-site video views  
40,736 mobile phone calls

### **Virtual Brochures**

111 virtual brochures  
27,998 downloads or views

### **Featured Event Listings**

18 participating partners  
47 total featured events  
51,899 views of featured events  
13,474 clicks to partner sites

### **Sweepstakes**

4 sweepstakes  
52,264 total entries

### **Homepage Sweepstakes**

2020 Travel Guide Sweepstakes (18,986 entries)  
North Carolina's Rowdy Energy Road Trip (17,423 entries)  
Experience Sanderling Resort and The Outer Banks Sweepstakes (11,203 entries)  
The Ultimate Getaway at Pinehurst Resort (4,652 entries)

### **Family of Sites**

#### **Media.VisitNC.com**

6,131 sessions in 2020  
4.6 average page views per session  
2:42 average session duration

#### **SportsNC.com**

9,836 sessions in 2020  
1.13 average page views per session  
0:43 average session duration

#### **NCFilm.com**

36,036 visits in 2020  
1.28 average page views per session  
1:44 average session duration

### **Database and Web Management**

Working in collaboration with hundreds of partners statewide, the team provided timely maintenance and technical support for VisitNC.com's extranet database of more than 11,600 lodging, attraction, event and dining listings reaching all 100 counties.

During the year, the team created and distributed a consistent program of e-newsletters, advisories and informational mailings to local tourism offices across the state.

We also incorporated more social networking efforts into the ongoing marketing program including Pinterest and Instagram to help support local tourism efforts and reach out to residents as well as visitors.

### **More Advertising Highlights**

Prior to the public health and safety measures that began being implemented more widely in North Carolina and elsewhere in March 2020, Visit NC was actively inspiring travel in paid advertising, including these highlights:

#### **Brand Core Media (Digital)**

Digital advertising plays a key role in all parts of the travel planning and decision-making funnel, and Visit NC's digital media plan reflects that via diversified tactics that strategically ladder to a common core goal of driving visitation to the state.

- **Paid Social (January to Mid-March 2020):** We tapped travelers where they're receptive and seeking inspiration during the pre-COVID-19 period via Facebook (various ad formats, from video to static link ads, to drive brand engagement at mass scale); Instagram (drive inspiration through visual storytelling via in-feed and real-time story units); and Pinterest (drive inspiration and discovery at the point of planning). Combined efforts accounted for more than 36 million impressions and more than 402,000 clicks.
- **Video (January to Mid-March 2020):** The team leaned into video as a progressively important and invested channel to increase brand awareness and affinity by drawing on emotional storytelling and demonstrating the richness of NC experiences. Core efforts were live during the pre-COVID-19 period and strategically seeded across various video arenas based on user consumption trending and ability to hyper-target audiences and measure media. Cox Connected Video was leveraged to activate OTT/CTV (cord-cutting TV systems) and follow TV-viewing fragmentation behavior. Similar to late 2019, YouTube and pre-roll video buys were centralized via DV360 (Google's self-service biddable platform), a continued effort to consolidate vendors and retain campaign control and budget fluidity. Combined efforts garnered more than 28 million impressions and 21 million video completions.
- **Paid Search (January to December 2020):** We continue to prioritize paid search efforts as an always-on media lever to capitalize on paid search's ability to intercept qualified user interest and intent; drive cost-efficient traffic to VisitNC.com content; and convert downstream clicks to partner sites. Paid search was live over the entire course of 2020, but investment levels did intentionally fluctuate month to month based on the evolving pandemic climate. Google continued to serve as the primary work horse, leveraging mixed "capture demand" and "create demand" strategies to cater to travel prospects with North Carolina already in mind while also inspiring those not searching by destination yet. Introduced into the paid search lineup as a complement to Google in Fall 2019, Bing was also a constant 2020 further expanding audience reach. In total, Google and Bing combined generated 10.4 million impressions and nearly 800,000 clicks.

## **Brand Core Media (Print)**

As part of the overall 19-20 fiscal plan, the 2020 spring print schedule continued to serve up a mixture of proven titles and categorized bundles based on strategic alignment across both brand and co-op partner interest.

### **Print Media | Spring 2020**

#### Regional & National Print

- *Garden & Gun*
- *Southern Living*
- *Good Housekeeping*
- *Woman's Day*
- *Country Living*

Local Market Combo: Large Markets

- *Atlanta Magazine*
- *Our State Magazine*
- *Philadelphia Magazine*
- *The Washington Post Magazine*

Local Market Combo: Northern Markets

- *Pittsburgh Magazine*
- *Richmond Magazine*
- *The Roanoker*
- *Cleveland Magazine*
- *Columbus Monthly*
- *Nashville Lifestyles*
- *Coastal Virginia Magazine*
- *Blue Ridge Country*

Local Market Combo: Southern Markets

- *Columbia Metropolitan Magazine*
- *Charlotte Magazine*
- *Charleston Magazine*
- *South Carolina Living*
- *The Town*
- *WALTER Magazine*

Local Market Combo: Florida

- *Jacksonville Magazine*
- *TAMPA Magazine*
- *Fort Lauderdale Magazine*
- *Orlando Magazine*

## **North Carolina Ski Areas Association**

Visit NC and the North Carolina Ski Areas Association (NCSAA) continued working together to build awareness and intent to visit NCSAA member resorts for winter travel. The November 2019 – February 2020 cooperative marketing effort targeted NC, FL, GA, SC, and TN and drove site visits to GoSkiNC.com and downstream referrals to the resorts’ own websites. Continuing to strategically optimize and refine the media mix based on the prior year’s results, the focused campaign leveraged paid search and paid social to generate nearly 129,000 site sessions and more than 30,400,00 downstream clicks to NCSAA websites.

## **In-State Marketing Initiatives**

While out-of-state visitors tend to stay longer and spend more when visiting the state, North Carolinians are also a point of focus within Visit NC’s program. Residents typically comprise approximately one-third of annual visitation, and partnerships with the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters, the North Carolina Press Foundation and UNC-TV remain key to Visit NC’s ability to cost-effectively reach more than ten million prospective travelers in the state’s own backyard.

## **North Carolina Association of Broadcasters**

Member television and radio stations aired 9,249 spots representing a value of \$647,496.

## **North Carolina Press Foundation**

More than 70 member publications published more than 2,300 ads representing a value of \$1,080,500.

## **PBS North Carolina**

PBS North Carolina's award-winning team airs 52 weekly episodes of its popular show North Carolina Weekend. Every episode is broadcast statewide multiple times each week on: PBS NC, The Explorer Channel and the North Carolina Channel. Visit NC's partnership with PBS North Carolina and North Carolina Weekend provided more than \$1.6 million in valuable exposure while featuring more than 200 destinations, attractions and events across the state.

## **Public Relations**

With journalists reluctant to travel because of the pandemic, the Public Relations program navigated 2020 with severely curtailed capabilities for arranging visits for media representatives. The two exceptions reflect the impact of this loss: visits from contributors to The Washington Post and Travel + Leisure to three Tier 1, four Tier 2 and two Tier 3 counties.

The pandemic also forced the suspension of media missions, a key partner program that enables partners from local tourism offices to meet with travel writers and other content creators to generate interest in visitation and coverage. A state of emergency was declared in March 2020, shortly after mini-missions to Canada with six destination partners and to Charleston, S.C., with four.

To meet the challenge of sustaining interest in future travel to North Carolina without those program anchors, the Public Relations team heightened its focus on pitching coverage ideas that were not dependent on visitation. The team also conducted a pair of virtual media missions via Zoom with the themes "NC Female Entrepreneurs" and "Pulling History Forward: Changemakers in NC Travel."

Those efforts led to print and digital coverage in such top-tier publications as Forbes, Travel + Leisure, The New York Times, Conde Nast Traveler, Departures, Essence, Outside, Food & Wine and Fodors. Consumer impressions totaled 2.2 billion with coverage representing 37 counties, 23 of which were classified as Tier 1 or 2.

## Visitor Services

North Carolina's nine Welcome Centers hosted **5,078,966** visitors in 2020. A breakout of the number of visitors by Welcome Center location is below:

<b>2020 Welcome Center Estimated Visitors</b>	
I-95 S	644,536
I-95 N	812,959
I-85 S	657,339
I-85 N	438,830
I-77 S	212,204
I-77 N	673,393
I-40 W	436,019
I-26 W	204,548
I-26 E	999,138
<b>Total:</b>	<b>5,078,966</b>

The I-26 East Welcome Center was the most visited in 2020, hosting nearly 1 million travelers. Welcome Centers registered about 2,318 visitors from other countries, overwhelmingly from Canada.

The heavily visited I-40 West and I-95 North Welcome Centers and rest areas were renovated throughout the year during extensive closures. New fixtures were installed at I-77 South in Charlotte and I-85 South in Kings Mountain, along with rocking chairs for visitors at most locations.

## **Publications**

The result of work throughout 2020, Visit NC worked with Meredith Travel Marketing to produce the Official 2021 North Carolina Travel Guide by mid-December 2020. The Official Travel Guide serves as Visit NC's primary fulfillment piece for potential visitors to and within the state. The Official North Carolina Travel Guide uses three different covers to reflect the diverse natural beauty found in the state's mountain, Piedmont and coastal regions. The mountain cover highlights a field of sunflowers at Ten-Acre Farm in Canton. For the Piedmont, the cover features the scenery at Treehouse Vineyards in Monroe. The coastal cover features paddling at Merchants Millpond State Park in Gatesville. Travel planners can find further assistance from the two-page map with major roads, bodies of water, parks, cities and towns.

Content within the guide was made as COVID-19-friendly as possible. The content includes all 100 counties in the first part of the guide. Listings were removed, allowing the ability to add 22 pages of inspiration-based content to the guidebook. For the 2021 NC Travel Guide, 150,000 of the guides – with plans to distribute these first – include a special “Have Mask Will Travel” insert, additional pages that address concerns made urgent by COVID-19. The insert highlights outdoor activities, recognizes local safety efforts, and directs travelers to CountOnMeNC.org to find hotels, restaurants and other businesses that have completed evidence-based training on best practices for limiting COVID-19. The statewide initiative also calls on travelers to join the effort by wearing mask, washing their hands frequently and watching their distance from others.

The 108-page 2021 Travel Guide, the official guide for North Carolina's state tourism office, was produced by Meredith Travel Marketing. It was financed by private industry support with \$836,443 in advertising, including the safety insert section, which helped produce 500,000 printed copies and digital edition. The self-mailer format for printed copies reinforces the green initiatives of Visit NC, which is part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.

## **NewsLink**

Emailed weekly to nearly 4,800 subscribers, *NewsLink* is an electronic publication designed to provide information to the North Carolina tourism industry. The mailing list also includes legislators, economic developers and media. In 2020, *NewsLink* covered 532 stories within the 49 weekly and one “Special Edition” issues, providing timely information on tourism-related research, statewide and international trends, media leads, updates on conferences and events, and other items of interest to those in the tourism field.

There is no subscription charge for this newsletter and it is available to anyone with a valid email address. It is only sent to those requesting to receive the newsletter.

## **Domestic Marketing**

### **American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace, January 2020, Omaha, NE**

ABA Marketplace is one of the premier industry events for the group travel industry, allowing travel buyers (tour operators) and sellers (destinations) to meet face-to-face in prescheduled appointments. In addition to the quality appointments, Marketplace offers professional education seminars and numerous networking opportunities. At the 2020 Marketplace, Visit NC:

- Conducted 29 appointments with tour operators during the week, promoting group travel throughout the state.
- 20 NC partners attended.

### **Travel South Showcase, March 8-11, 2020, Baton Rouge, LA**

This showcase is a regional appointment-style marketplace focused on increasing travel to and within the Southern states. The showcase offers the most targeted opportunity for tour operators / wholesalers and travel service providers to meet face-to-face with Southern travel suppliers. Visit NC utilized showcase opportunities to:

- Team with 25 NC travel industry partners and conduct strategic, business development meetings.
- Met with 24 domestic tour operators, focusing on what's new with the state's tourism products and on North Carolina's position as a travel destination market leader.

### **AAA Northeast Road Trips Takeover Week**

Visit NC partnered with AAA to participate in a week of road trip ideas for AAA agents in the Northeast – one of the best feeder markets for drive visitors. The focus was Drive Thru Vacations and promoted through social posts to the agents through an educational webinar, social post, and a virtual happy hour with special guest, Richard Beard, an accomplished luthier from Rutherfordton and a representative from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and Blue Ridge Craft Trails.

### **2020 Annual Blue Ridge Parkway Familiarization Tour – cancelled due to COVID-19**

### **NCMA, VMA, MCASC Regional Meeting – cancelled due to COVID-19**



## **International Marketing**

### **Canada**

#### **Market Highlights:**

- Multiple daily non-stop flights to Charlotte Douglas and Raleigh-Durham airports until March 2020.
- No. 1 international market with 93,851 visitors due to ease of access via highways and direct air service. The majority of overnight visitors came from the province of Ontario followed by those from Quebec.
- These visitors spent \$52 million.

#### **Cooperative Marketing & Advertising Opportunities**

Visit NC teamed with Brand USA, the nation's official tourism office, in a spring multichannel initiative which was then interrupted in March just prior to launch. The campaign will resume in 2021. The campaign included a one-page ad circulated through several major publications in Canada (digital and print), social amplification via Brand USA's social channels, co-branding through Expedia's Discover America landing page and guaranteed impressions through Google's display network.

#### **Zoom Golf Lesson and Demo**

Through our international representation office in Canada, Visit NC teamed with Pinehurst Resort and the Pinehurst, Southern Pines & Aberdeen CVB to host a virtual golf demonstration and overview of the region to 160 Canadian travel trade professionals including journalists.

#### **Total Mom Event**

Visit NC partnered with the Total Mom Inc. on their second annual [Canada's Total Mom Show](#) presented by Scotiabank Women Initiative, powered by Visa Canada. As part of this partnership, Visit NC sponsored a recognition award called the North Carolina Mountain to Coast Award which saw more than 100 applicants for consideration. In addition to the recognition award, Visit NC and Explore Brevard sponsored The Land of Waterfalls Trip Giveaway which was featured in the events virtual 'door prize' promotion and the small business vendor market.

#### **Travel Agent Webinars**

To stay top-of-mind prior to the borders opening a series of webinars were held to travel agents in key markets. They reached 6000 agents in total.

#### **Virtual Media Missions and Trade Shows**

Visit NC and 7 local tourism office partners met virtually with more than 27 media members in Toronto.

All consumer tradeshow were either held virtually or cancelled in 2020.

#### **Canadian Public Relations Campaign with Toronto Star**

This program was a multi-tiered campaign focusing on COVID-19 safety with the Toronto Star. The program overdelivered with 1,310 page views and an average time on site of 3.4 minutes.

### **Overseas Visitors**

In 2020, North Carolina attracted 189,202 international visitors who spent an estimated \$237 million in the state. Canada, the U.K. and Mexico were the top countries of origin to the state in terms of visitor volume. Other top countries of origin were Germany, India, Japan, Brazil, China, France, South Korea and Australia.

### **North Carolina's Top 15 International Markets by Market Share (Ranked by Visitors)**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>2020 Estimated Visitors</b>	<b>Percent Change from 2019</b>	<b>2020 Estimated Spending</b>	<b>Percent Change from 2019</b>	<b>Average Spending per Visitor</b>
1	Canada	93,851	-77%	\$52,150,403	-72%	\$556
2	United Kingdom	13,480	-84%	\$24,138,007	-82%	\$1,791
3	Mexico	11,535	-61%	\$5,752,779	-55%	\$499
4	Germany	7,002	-86%	\$9,852,891	-85%	\$1,407
5	India	5,669	-80%	\$13,002,167	-75%	\$2,293
6	Japan	4,179	-81%	\$8,204,571	-76%	\$1,963
7	Brazil	3,665	-78%	\$9,947,336	-74%	\$2,714
8	China	3,310	-90%	\$8,909,944	-87%	\$2,692
9	France	2,954	-84%	\$3,634,562	-81%	\$1,230
10	South Korea	2,444	-79%	\$4,780,549	-74%	\$1,956
11	Australia	2,292	-84%	\$4,587,931	-81%	\$2,002
12	Spain	1,639	-85%	\$1,890,856	-84%	\$1,154
13	Sweden	1,192	-84%	\$1,701,076	-81%	\$1,427
14	Russia	1,177	-78%	\$2,768,031	-74%	\$2,353
15	Ireland	1,115	-85%	\$1,293,080	-83%	\$1,160
16	Italy	1,070	-90%	\$1,303,290	-89%	\$1,218
17	Argentina	916	-79%	\$1,297,179	-76%	\$1,417
18	Denmark	865	-85%	\$2,102,719	-83%	\$2,431
19	Norway	803	-84%	\$1,531,393	-82%	\$1,908
20	Israel	756	-81%	\$1,603,871	-76%	\$2,122
	<b>Total</b>	<b>189,202</b>	<b>-79%</b>	<b>\$237,651,150</b>	<b>-77%</b>	<b>\$1,256</b>

*\*Tourism Economics, 2021*

### **U.K. and Ireland**

#### **Market Highlights:**

- The top overseas market to North Carolina.
- The state is served directly with two daily non-stop flights to Heathrow – delayed in March 2020.

## **Sales & Marketing Accomplishments**

### **National Geographic Traveler Event**

North Carolina was the featured destination on the “NatGeo Traveler virtual series.” The event consisted of a panel discussion facilitated by the National Geographic Traveler editor and a cooking demonstration with chef, Cheetie Kumar of Garland in Raleigh. The program was promoted in print and on social to more than 1.2 million subscribers. It was the second most watched event the publication has hosted.

### **Sales & Marketing Co-ops, Trade Shows and Consumer Shows**

All these efforts were paused or cancelled once flights were grounded, and borders closed.

## **Germany**

### **Market Highlights:**

- No. 2 overseas market with 7,002 visitors to North Carolina.
- Visitors spent \$9.9 million.
- Supporting three daily non-stop flights from Munich and Frankfurt to the state until paused in March 2020.

## **Sales and Marketing Accomplishments**

### **America Unlimited Podcast**

The program consisted of a podcast interview that was a follow-up the success of 2019’s video by the same tour operator. The 40-minute podcast discussed NC’s great destinations and vacation areas. The results were 32,000 You Tube views and social posts reaching 50,000 Germans. The podcast had 1,240 live listeners with an 86 percent retention rate.

### **Virtual Roadshow**

Visit NC participated in the Visit USA virtual roadshows in Germany, Switzerland and Austria training more than 340 travel agents in total on North Carolina’s travel assets.

## **Sales & Marketing Accomplishments**

All Co-op Marketing was paused after March 2020 until the borders reopen.

### **German Public Relations**

### **Copper Barrel Moonshine Demo**

Visit NC along with the Wilkesboro Visitors Bureau and Copper Barrel Distillery held an event with 25 journalists to learn more about the history of moonshine. All journalists were shipped the ingredients to make a Cooper Barrel signature cocktail. Then the groups met virtually to make the cocktail, discuss the

drink and talk about the unique aspects and moonshine history of the region.

## **Other International News**

### **Travel South USA**

Through a partnership with Travel South USA, Visit NC has also been able to cost-effectively secure limited PR and marketing representation in France, Italy, the Benelux countries, China and the Nordic countries.

### **Denmark/Sweden**

In February, Visit NC exhibited at the FDM (Federation of Danish Motorists) consumer tradeshow and at Swedish tour operator, Swanson's, annual consumer event. Visitation from both countries is in the top 20 to NC.

### **IPW – postponed to Fall 2021**

### **WeChat in China**

Visit NC has continued monthly posts to our WeChat account as part of a Travel South partnership. The posts enable us to keep in contact with trade and consumer partners in China.

**Brand USA Co-op Marketing Programs** – all programs paused due to COVID-19

## **Tourism Development**

Visit NC's Tourism Development Manager continued to work with rural communities to foster visitation to the lesser-known areas of the state. In addition, working with these communities to foster its culture and heritage through various genres of traditional and heritage music and heritage trails and programs across the state. Small towns are an important part of the North Carolina landscape.

Visit NC is actively involved in ongoing programming either independently or in conjunction with partners such as the **NC Rural Center**, the **Department of Commerce's Division of Community Assistance**, the **Department of Natural & Cultural Resources**, **NC Arts Council**, **NC Folklife Institute** and other entities to foster revitalization that will make the communities more attractive to residents and visitors. To do so, Visit NC's Tourism Development team:

- Set goals for the Tourism Development Program and improved the delivery of information for the program on the Visit NC website. The effort is designed to make local communities more aware of resources within Visit NC as well as other opportunities for tourism development.
- Gathered information for Visit NC's film office, public relations, domestic marketing and international marketing programs.
- Continued to research available resources in the form of grants, technical assistance and development (state, federal, private philanthropic).
- Made presentations to partners throughout North Carolina on Cultural Heritage Tourism Development and ways to work with Visit NC through its TRAC Program.
- Represented Visit NC in partnership the African American Heritage Commission.

- Continued to assist with the promotion of the Blue Ridge Music Trails of NC, Freedom Roads, US Civil Rights Trail, NC Civil War Trails, NC Civil Rights Trail and other products in the regions.
- Continued promotion of the NC Certified Retirement Community Program.

### **Tourism Resource Assistance Center (TRAC)**

The Tourism Resource Assistance Center (TRAC) program was developed along with the Industry Relations Manager to bring Visit NC's program managers to local, mostly rural communities to share and discuss the nuts and bolts of partnering effectively with Visit NC. At a TRAC, Visit NC brings staff from every department to an area and hosts local tourism businesses for the entire day. No appointment is needed so small business owners can come at a time that is convenient for them.

#### TRAC Sessions 2020:

- Columbus/Polk Co.
- We were unable to host any additional TRAC sessions due to COVID-19.

During the pandemic the Partner & Industry Relations team regularly called all of our more than 100 partners to gauge how the pandemic was affecting their areas and how Visit NC could assist.

### **Consumer Show Attendance**

Visit NC led groups of in-state partners at three Virtual Consumers Shows in 2020:

1. Travel & Adventure Show Atlanta – Partners (Boone Tourism Development Authority; Burlington/Alamance Tourism Development Authority; Yadkin Visitors Center; Mount Airy Tourism Development Authority; Bryson City Tourism Development Authority; OBX Visitors Bureau; Randolph County Tourism Development Authority; and Lexington Tourism Development Authority)
2. Other shows (NY Times Travel Show, Travel & Adventure Show DC) were cancelled due to COVID-19.

### **Community Partnerships and Heritage Development**

Visit NC also continued to be actively engaged in the development of outdoor recreational/ecotourism/agritourism/heritage opportunities in the regions across the state. Farms, waterways, hiking and biking trails, greenways and open spaces are important features in a community that improve and promote quality of life and link people with their natural and cultural heritage. These partnerships include assistance in researching resources for communities, working with communities interested in Tourism Development Authority development, marketing initiatives, heritage trails development and product development plans. Created by congressional legislation, the **Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA)** is supported through a partnership with Visit NC to assist in coordinating planning for the 25 counties in the designated region. Visit NC continued to assist in the implementation of the initiatives outlined in each county's heritage plan, and had an active role in assisting the BRNHA in developing, facilitating and guiding communities along the Blue Ridge Parkway for themes such as agriculture, arts and culture, traditional music, history/heritage and natural resources. In addition, Visit NC continued work on the **Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina** with the BRNHA and the **NC Arts Council** to roll out a new book and map guide, as well as collaborated closely with the communities participating in the **NC STEP Program** through the **NC Rural Center** and the **NC Main Street Program**.

## North Carolina Civil War Trails

The Civil War Trails Program is marketed in five states – Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina, with more than 1,000 interpretive markers. Visit NC continued to partner with the **NC Department of Transportation** and **NC Department of Natural & Cultural Resources** to promote the NC Civil War Trails program. Marketing Universals were developed by Civil War Trails Inc. and all five state partners to display the program as the “best” and most factually authentic way to experience Civil War history, using social media, print and online advertising.

- An updated Civil War Trails map has been printed and is available online and in all NC Welcome Centers.
- Visitors can download Civil War Trails maps from [www.VisitNC.com](http://www.VisitNC.com), receive mapguides via mail through the Call Center as well as in the (9) Welcome Centers.
- N.C. has 279 sites in 78 counties.

## Cultural Heritage Trails Development

- Assisted in the promotion of the Blue Ridge Music Trails, partnering with the NC Department of Natural & Cultural Resources, NC Arts Council, BRNHA and other communities in the region.
- Assisted in the promotion of the Blue Ridge Craft Trails.
- Worked with the NC Department of Natural & Cultural Resources in the development of the **African American Music Trail** in the counties of Onslow, Lenoir, Craven, Pitt, Edgecombe, Wilson, Wayne and Greene.
- Worked with the African American Heritage Commission in the development of “**Freedom Roads**” **Underground Railroad Heritage Trail**, **NC Civil Rights Trail** and also collaborated with the **Gullah Geechee National Heritage Corridor**.
- Continued to work with the **NC Folklife Institute** to promote the traditional arts of North Carolina.
- Work with Travel South USA to promote the **U.S. Civil Rights Trail**.

## Certified Retirement Community Program

The NC Department of Commerce operates a community development program for communities that are positioning for retiree attraction as an economic and community development strategy. The N.C. General Assembly, during the 2008 short session, recognized the inherent panoply of quality living the state offers and established the N.C. Certified Retirement Community Program (S.L. 2008-188) as a vehicle to designate communities offering this unprecedented quality of living sought after by the mature community.

To gain certification, a local government must submit an application for consideration. Initial evaluation of the community and technical assistance is provided by the Department of Commerce’s Community Development Division. The designation has a five-year life, after which communities will need to consider recertification at the sunset of the five-year period. Once a community has completed the certification process, Visit NC will help market and promote the community.

- Visit NC worked with the **NC Department of Commerce Community Assistance** office to administer and review applications.

- Visit NC's Tourism Development Manager continued to make presentations to local County Commissions and City Managers on the guidelines, requirements and benefits of the program to increase participation.

Visit NC continued to attend conferences on trends, research and developing retirement communities, and serves on the Board of Directors for the **American Association of Retirement Communities (AARC)**.

Visit NC continued to promote certified communities and areas of North Carolina during the Ideal Living Regional Expos in Long Island, NY; Chicago, IL; and Greenwich, CT; along with virtual expo in Sept. 2020 in New Jersey and DC.

Results:

- 4,600 leads generated.
- 650 packets downloads from retirenc.com.
- 204 packets mailed through the Call Center.
- 2,719 moves to North Carolina.

**Visit North Carolina's certified communities include:**

1. Lumberton (pilot program)
2. Marion
3. Mt. Airy
4. Edenton
5. Tarboro
6. Winterville
7. New Bern
8. Lenoir
9. Laurinburg
10. Reidsville
11. Jamestown/High Point
12. Washington
13. Roanoke Rapids
14. Elizabeth City
15. Johnston County
16. Salisbury
17. Carteret County

## **Industry Relations**

### **Visit NC 365 –held virtually**

Visit NC's annual conference for the state's travel and hospitality industry was cancelled just a week out due to COVID-19. The 2020 Winner's Circle Awards were selected and individually presented their awards throughout the year. Honorees for 2020 included John Harris, Marla Tambellini, Scott Mason, and the Esse Quam Videri Award to Bill Carson for the Orchard at Altapass.

### **Virtual Meetings/Convention Tradeshow**

Visit NC in partnership with Northstar held three virtual tradeshow focusing on local, regional, and national meeting planners. The events featured 81 planners from across the nation. We also had 15 partner local tourism organizations join us for the event.

### **Tourism Week in Raleigh - Cancelled**

### **U.S. Travel Association's Destination Capitol Hill**

Originally scheduled for April 1, the event was cancelled, and a virtual event held later in the summer. Visit NC along with two local tourism office partners held appointments with key legislators in Washington, D.C.

## **Sports**

### **Virtual TEAMS Conference, 2020**

Visit NC participated in the annual TEAMS (Travel, Events And Management in Sports) Conference & Expo held virtually due to COVID-19. In addition to the virtual booth display, Visit NC under the branding of SportsNC, had 36 pre-scheduled appointments and collected an additional 30 leads. While we were not a sponsor this year, we did receive (due to our long-time partnership with the conference) additional added value promotion including: a full page ad in their digital conference program, a promo item in their mailout to sportsrights holders, our video was played during opening session, and our logo on display on the sponsor rotation. Four NC local tourism offices/sports commissions also attended the virtual conference. TEAMS is one of the premier trade shows for sports planners to meet with destinations and sports organizations to conduct business as well as learn about industry trends and best practices related to sports.

### **NC Virtual Sports Mission -**

Visit NC hosted two, week-long SportsNC virtual sports sales missions, where 22 local tourism office partners participated in meetings with local and national sports organizations in a virtual platform. Partners learned more about what sports event organizers look for from host destinations/facilities and had the opportunity to market themselves for future events. Those partners that were unable to participate were provided with recordings from the meetings.

### **Mountains to Coast Ride – the ride and the excursions were cancelled due to COVID-19**



## **Outdoor NC**

Championing the preservation of NC's natural environments, Visit NC led the creation of Outdoor NC, a strategic partnership with the globally recognized Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and NC Outdoor Recreation Industry Office. Visit NC's partner relations department managed the program and worked to sign up industry organizations as part of the campaign. This program is for anyone that has outdoor spaces – city parks, county recreational areas, trails, beaches, etc. These areas have all seen tremendous increases in visitation due to COVID-19. The majority of visitors are not familiar with how to protect the outdoor spaces and don't realize how they might be damaging the area or getting into danger themselves.

The initiative includes outreach to visitors and residents with NC specific principles via social media and assets in the partner toolkit. The program will help ensure that visitors have a safe trip to North Carolina and that they will treat our outdoor spaces with the respect and care that they deserve.

## **North Carolina Film Office (FilmNC)**

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, North Carolina had a successful year in film production.

The North Carolina Film Office (FilmNC) and regional film commissions promoted filmmaking in North Carolina at the Association of Film Commissioners International's (AFCI) 2<sup>nd</sup> annual AFCI Week and made several sales calls to the West Coast. In 2020, FilmNC was once again promoting the state at the annual Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Many other marketing efforts and promotions at events were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, rather than altogether cancelling FilmNC's regular quarterly recruiting trips to the greater Los Angeles area, the staff was able to re-imagine the deskside visits and replace them with virtual meetings in which staff was able to not only share information about the state's film rebate program, but also the guidelines for returning to work in North Carolina and the safety measures that were in place.

Because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, FilmNC worked with state and local health officials to present standards for safely returning to work on film sets in a way that would mitigate the spread of COVID-19. FilmNC advocated and received endorsements from officials on productions following the industry-wide safety plan, which included regular testing and mask wearing for those on set, new cleaning standards, and the creation of zones that restricted who and where crew members and talent should interact with and go on sets. Additionally, FilmNC worked with in-state vendors to find PPE and COVID-19 testing suppliers and other resources related to the industry returning to work.

Locally, FilmNC continued its sponsorship with the Cucalorus Foundation's "Filmed In NC" filmmakers fund, given out to North Carolina filmmakers to help highlight their works on a national and international stage, while continuing to use various online resources to promote more than 30 film festivals held across the state.

### **2020 Total Production Estimates & Highlights\* from N.C. Film Office:**

- 41 projects.
- \$101,331,635 direct spend by productions.
- 847 production days.
- 9,038 jobs opportunities created.

- 1,460 crew, 420 talent, 7,158 extras

*\*per information provided to FilmNC and/or one of the regional film commissions in the state*

**Highlights/National Productions of Note that filmed in North Carolina during 2020 include:**

- *Delilah (Season 1)* – Charlotte Film Region (grant recipient)
- *Secrets of the Zoo: North Carolina* – Piedmont Triad Film Region
- *Wicked Tuna: Outer Banks (Season 7)* – North Eastern Film Region
- *Where’s Rose* – Piedmont Triad Film Region
- *My Big Fat Fabulous Life (Season 8)* – Piedmont Triad Film Region
- *Scream (filmed as “Parkside”)* – Wilmington Film Region
- *Love It or List It (Season 16)*– Research Triangle Film Region
- *Hightown (Season 2)* – Wilmington Film Region (grant recipient)
- *USS Christmas* – Wilmington Film Region (grant recipient)
- *A Nashville Christmas Carol* – Charlotte Film Region (grant recipient)
- *Welcome to Flatch (Season 1) (filmed as “This Country”)*– Wilmington Film Region (grant recipient)
- *Rosebud Lane* – Western Film Region
- *National Commercials for Volvo, GMC, Capital One, and Sam Adams*

---

FIRSTS THAT LAST and the NC ‘brush stroke’ design are service marks of the EDPNC.

###