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## Visit Tuolumne County 2019-2020 Annual Report

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October 2020

2019 was a record-breaking year for tourism in Tuolumne County and across California. Growth was seen in every sector of the industry and the future was bright. Enter March of 2020. The world was hit with the Covid-19 pandemic and California's strong, record-breaking tourism industry came to a screeching halt being hit hard and fast across the board. Tuolumne County was no exception. At Visit Tuolumne County we are feeling the pain of staff cutbacks, decreased revenue, and many new challenges.

All is not lost. We have come together as a team and looked at this situation as an opportunity to reprioritize how and what we do. We have been keying in more on destination stewardship and sustainability touting responsible travel. Key initiatives include the *Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge* and the "Adventure Responsibly" message echoed throughout our new *Wander Freely* campaign. We have used social media to celebrate new local businesses and those that have adapted so much throughout these past few months.



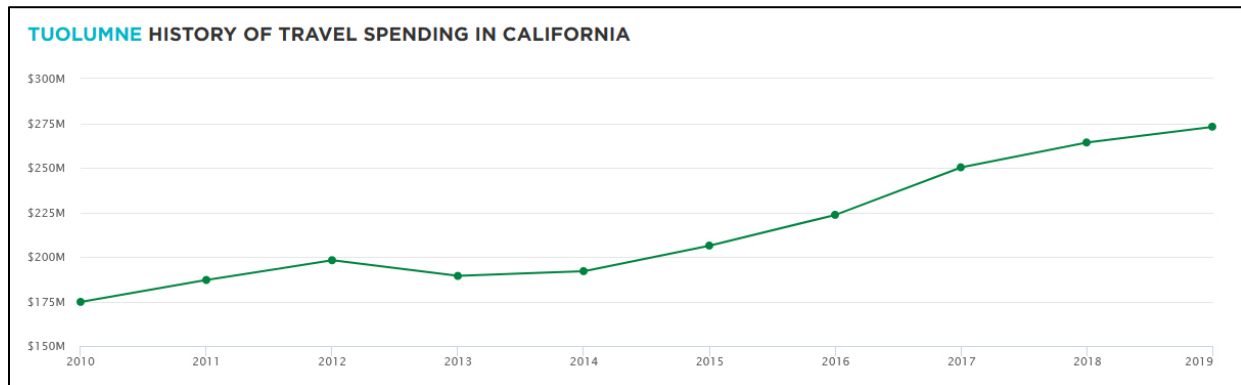
Looking back on the year that was, we have a new understanding of the vulnerability of the tourism industry and more importantly have an even deeper appreciation for the resiliency of the people who make up Tuolumne County's largest private sector industry. We are committed to doing all we can to help Tuolumne County's tourism industry to thrive once again.

Thank you,

Lisa Mayo, CDME  
President & CEO  
Visit Tuolumne County

## 2019 Overall Tourism Stats for Tuolumne County

In 2019, Tuolumne County saw the 6<sup>th</sup> year in a row of increased visitor spending with a 7% increase over 2018. California's state-wide average increase in visitor spending was 3.2%. Tuolumne County's growth was over twice that of California destinations as a whole.



Total Direct Travel Spending*	\$273 million
Tourism Industry Employment*	2,445
Government Revenue Generated by Tourism	
Local Sales Tax Receipts	\$9.3 million
State Sales Tax Receipts	\$11.7 million
Transient Occupancy Tax	\$5.2 million
State and local tax revenue equivalency per Tuolumne County household	\$960

\*These statistics do not include spending or job generation by either Black Oak Casino Resort or by Chicken Ranch Casino as they fall under Government. Casino employment estimated to be 1,500 plus. Reported by Dean Runyan Associates

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## Highlights of 2019-2020

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### SPECIAL PROMOTION: Tuolumne County Restaurant Week

Visit Tuolumne County (VTC) was excited to re-introduce and host Tuolumne County Restaurant Week, a celebration of local cuisine, chefs, wine and cider makers, and food producers. During the week of January 19-25<sup>th</sup>, local restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops, and more offered special menu items or discounts for the week.



Tuolumne County Restaurant Week coincides with California Restaurant Month which was dedicated by Visit California as a way to enrich culinary tourism in the state and as an effort to help boost the economy in what is traditionally a slow time of the year.

Participation was free to VTC members (over 25 participated), and participating members' and their offerings were promoted on the Visit Tuolumne County website and through its social media platforms. VTC promoted Restaurant Week through social media, radio campaigns, print advertising in regional publications and through PR efforts. Additionally, Tuolumne County Restaurant Week was promoted at a high level on Visit California's social media platforms and website.

Read the [Tuolumne County Restaurant Week Recap here](#). 100% of the respondents to Tuolumne County Restaurant Week post survey indicated they would participate or potentially participate in the next Tuolumne County Restaurant Week. The 2021 Tuolumne County Restaurant Week is scheduled for January 22-31.

### Agritourism Summit

VTC hosted its first Agritourism Summit at Hurst Ranch on February 20, 2020. Sierra Pacific Foundation was a contributing sponsor of the event. Approximately 40 members of the public attended and learned about the opportunities of leveraging Tuolumne County's Agricultural Resources. Agenda topics included understanding the visitor experience with guest speaker Melyssa Laughlin from Visit Vacaville, insurance liability issues and answers presented by Justin Myers from Caldwell Insurance, assessing agritourism potential of your land/farm with guest speaker Penny Leff from U.C. Davis, navigating regulations and permitting presented by Quincy Yaley from Tuolumne County's Community Development Department, and testimonial from Leslie Hurst a local Agritourism Operator. Attendees were treated to a locally-grown farm to fork luncheon.

Over the years the idea of agritourism has increased and become a niche interest of travelers to and in the United States. Agritourism gives



visitors the chance to experience farms first-hand, support the farms directly and promote sustainable agriculture economic growth.

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*Lisa Mayo, President & CEO comments, "We've had local leaders express the desire to grow our agritourism offerings. This is a great way to connect people with the resources they need to move forward."*

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## California Poppy Award

In February 2020, Visit California honored tourism destinations and attractions across California for excellence in tourism marketing at the organization's biennial Poppy Awards.



Yosemite National Park along with Yosemite Gateway Counties- Mono, Tuolumne, Mariposa, and Madera were selected as the winner in a surprise inaugural category—"Excellence in Destination Stewardship" recognizing the destinations for their collaborative digital influencer campaign. The funding for the campaign was a grant from Yosemite National Park for the purpose of encouraging travelers to visit the region on off-peak days or seasons, take public transportation into the valley and to arrive early if taking their own vehicle.



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*"We are extremely honored to collectively receive this award," stated Scott Gediman, Chief of Public & Legislative Affairs at Yosemite National Park. "Our gateway partners have been instrumental in working closely with us in getting the message out about how to visit the park responsibly. We are so grateful for their efforts and couldn't do it without the support of these great partners."*

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*"The Poppy Awards celebrate the best and brightest in California tourism promotion and inspire the industry to continue on a path of innovation and creativity," said Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California. "This year's finalists inspired travelers from around the world to live their biggest dreams in California."*

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## VTC Hires Augustine Agency as Agency of Record

In February 2020, the VTC team interviewed various advertising agencies in search of an Agency of Record to escalate marketing efforts to the next level. The team chose Augustine Agency out of Sacramento which represents other DMOs such as the City of Napa and North Lake Tahoe. When Covid happened, the first task of

Augustine Agency shifted to creating a phased recovery campaign that would keep Tuolumne County top of mind for potential travelers in what was sure to be an ultra-competitive market like we had never seen before. The Wander Freely campaign was born and initially launched in June, paused the first week of July and relaunched in October. Augustine has been incredibly flexible in their ability to shift messaging and outreach at any given time which has been very important during the past eight months.

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## Marketing Programs

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VTC's destination marketing strategy is one rooted in amplifying its brand-Visit Tuolumne County: Yosemite, Gold Country and High Sierra, throughout California, the United States and in international markets. The marketing efforts stretch over strategic partnerships with consistent messaging over multi-channel platforms, including print advertising in key travel-related magazines and newspapers sections, digital advertising in targeted markets, social media, promotions on radio and television and more.

### Launch of Wander Freely

In conjunction with the re-opening of Yosemite National Park and lodging properties VTC launched its newest brand campaign 'Wander Freely' as the destination safely welcomes back visitors to the area. The goal of the multi-phased campaign is to inspire family, friend and solo getaways primarily focused on the region's many outdoor experiences, wide-open spaces and charming towns.



By utilizing owned, earned and paid media channels, the campaign is targeting nearby drive market residents in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Greater Sacramento area, reminding these potential visitors the destination is ready to welcome them with open arms when they are ready.

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*"We want to encourage people to get outside and explore nature again after being inside their homes for several months," said Lisa Mayo, President & CEO of Visit Tuolumne County. "We hope travelers will see how easy it is to wander freely in Tuolumne County. The area offers an abundance of open-air outings including Yosemite explorations, California Gold Rush Country discoveries and High Sierra adventures. We are excited to be welcoming visitors back to our diverse scenery and fresh air."*

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### VTC Annual Vacation Planner

- Printed 100,000 copies
  - Increased distribution in Bay Area: 70,000 at San Jose and Oakland International Airports, BART stations, Peet's Coffee houses, Whole Foods stores, etc.
  - 10,000 to California Welcome Centers at Pier 39 in San Francisco, Mammoth Lakes and Merced
  - 20,000 distributed at travel and trade shows, in visitor centers and to VTC members for distribution, plus mailed to leads generated by publications in which we advertise
- Digital version available online

### Website

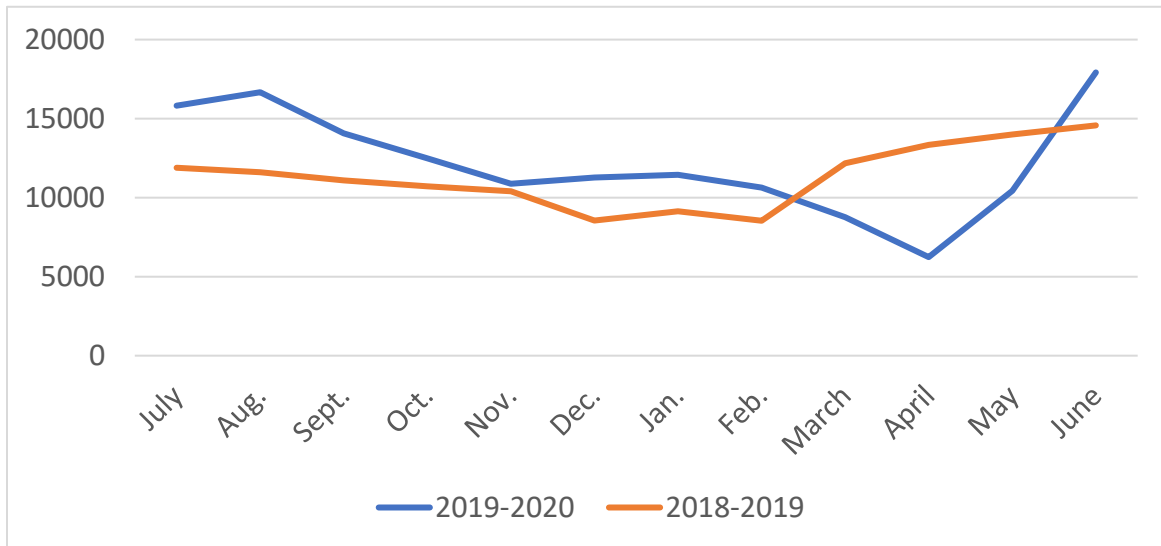
Many of VTC's marketing initiatives are built to drive potential visitors to the VTC website where they will be inspired to take a trip to Tuolumne County. Visitors to the website can book lodging directly from the website. Website traffic continues to grow year over year. In 2019-2020, traffic to the website increased by 7%, with 174,560 sessions, over the 2018-2019 year. Although traffic was off to a great start at the beginning of the



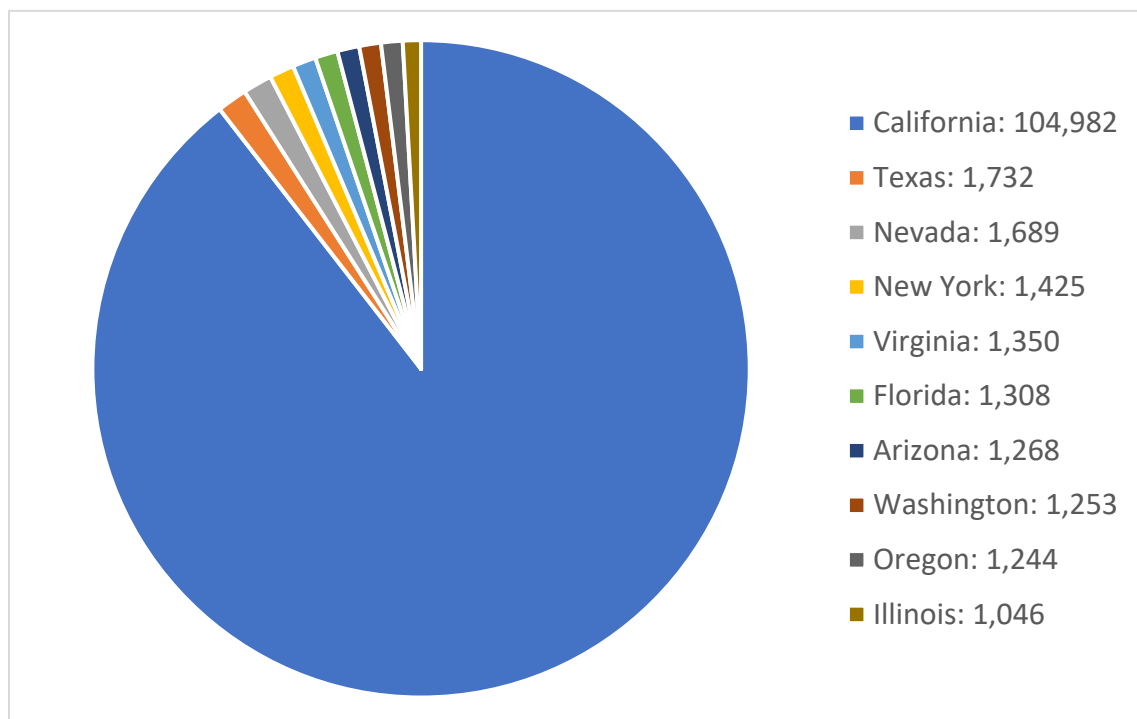
year, (pacing 26% higher July 2019 through February 2020 over the previous year) it decreased significantly during the Covid-19 shutdown beginning in March. Traffic increased considerably in May and June as people were looking to travel again, with launch of the Wander Freely campaign and the simultaneous reopening of Yosemite and lodging accommodations.

- 1,430 vacation planner leads were collected via the website request form.

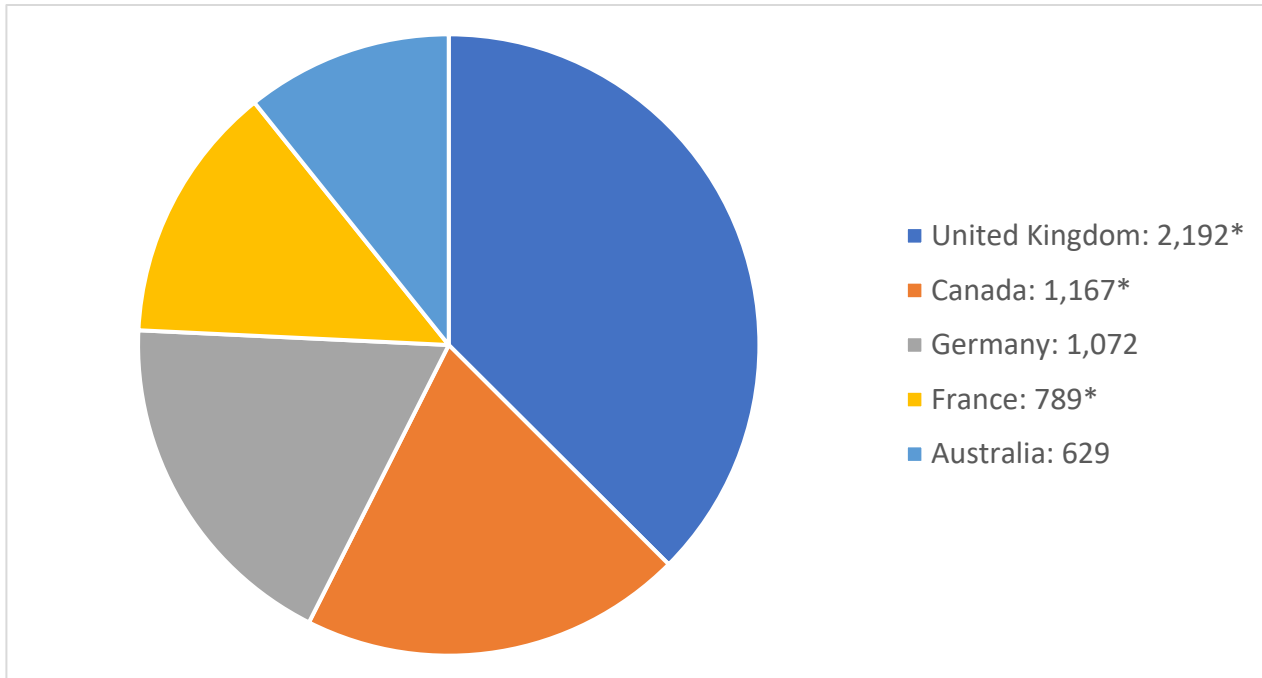
Website Traffic: 2019-2020 vs. 2018-2019:



Top 10 State origins for web traffic:



### Top 5 International origins for web traffic:



\*Visit Tuolumne County is promoted in these countries through partnerships with Gold Country Visitors Association, High Sierra Visitors Council and through representation with Black Diamond in the UK and Development Counsellors International in Canada.

### Booking Referral Engine

- A booking *referral* engine is a segment of the VTC website that allows visitors to find lodging based on dates, towns and areas. The booking is completed through the lodging properties own booking engines and is truly a book direct option for visitors. VTC continues to incur the entire cost of this platform as a benefit to its lodging members.
  - Generated 8,210 referrals to Tuolumne County lodging properties
  - Estimated bookings: 230
  - Estimated ROI: \$67,934

### Continued Advertising Partnerships

- *San Francisco Travel Planner* (Circulation 225,000, readers: 535,000)
  - Half-page print ad
  - Digital ads on [www.sftravel.com](http://www.sftravel.com)
- *Yosemite Journal*
  - Full-page ad in annual print publication (Circulation 100,000)
  - Multiple Tuolumne County inclusive articles in the publication
  - Facebook posts
  - Digital ads on [MyYosemitePark.com](http://MyYosemitePark.com) and in e-newsletters
  - California Road Trip Giveaway
- *KGO On the Go Magazine*
  - Ad on back cover of “KGO on the Go” Magazine (annual)



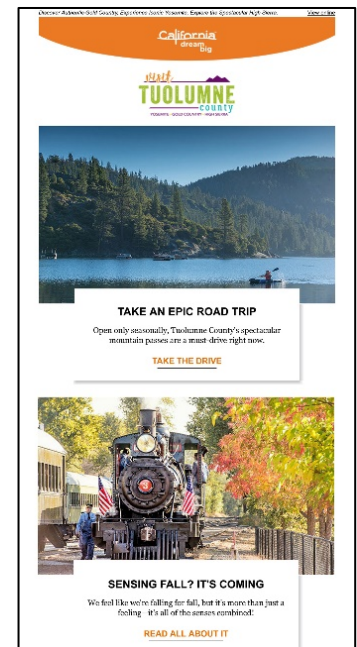
- Editorial article on Tuolumne County
  - Radio commercials and mentions: 90x
  - Streaming commercials and mentions: 60x
  - KGO provided added value radio spots during PSPS recovery in November 2019
- *California Visitors Guide* (the official California Visitors Guide produced by Visit California; circulation 500,000)
  - Full-page print ad in cooperation with OARS, Railtown 1897 State Historic Park and Rush Creek and Evergreen Lodges
  - Cooperative ad with Gold Country Visitors Association
  - Generated 1,120 vacation planner requests/leads
- *Oh, Ranger!* Yosemite National Park Guide (Circulation 290,000, readers: 1.1 million)
  - Half-page print ad



California Visitors  
Guide Ad

## Advertising in Periodicals and Other Internet Publications

- *Sunset Magazine* (includes Northern and Southern California editions; circulation 665,000)
  - Banner ads across Sunset.com ran in October 2019
  - Print ads in November 2019 and January 2020
  - E-Newsletter Sponsorship in January 2020
- *Adventure Outdoors* (Readers: 550,000)
  - Half-page ad: Spring 2020
  - 5 days of social media boosted posts
- *Where Magazine*, San Francisco Bay Area
  - Ads in monthly magazine (80,000 copies in 27,000 Bay Area guest rooms):
    - August, September, October, November, December 2019
- *VIA Magazine* (Readers: 5.6 million)
  - Print ad: Winter 2019-2020
- *DogTrekker.com*
  - Banner ads July-September 2019
  - VTC and member content included on their website
- *Visit California*
  - E-newsletter sponsorship: August 5, 2019
    - Total delivered: 133,965
    - Number opened: 34,560
    - Clicks on newsletter: 3,807
    - Click through open rate = 11% (Average CTOR for VCA dedicated newsletters in 2019 was 9.27%)
    - Generated 140+ vacation planner requests within 24 hours of send
  - Banner Ads on VisitCalifornia.com: August – October 2018



Visit California  
Dedicated  
Newsletter

## Regional Advertising

- Explore Sonora
- Sierra Repertory Theatre newsletters
- MyMotherLode.com (digital ads) for Holiday “Shop Local” and “Tuolumne Adventure Trolley” campaigns
- Tuolumne County Transit bus back wrap
- Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce monthly Union Democrat ad



“Shop Local”  
MyMotherLode.com  
digital ad

## Television Commercial

- Continued running in Sacramento, Tri-Valley (Pleasanton, Dublin, Livermore), and Fremont
  - Sacramento Commercial Airs (approx. 1.3 million households):
  - Tri Valley and Fremont (approx. 138,700 households)
- Spots in new market: Central Orange County

## Radio

- Numerous radio spots aired in the Bay Area (KGO and KOIT) and Central Valley to promote fall visitation and the Power Up the Shopping Season campaign.
- Local radio aired spots promoting Tuolumne County Restaurant Week and highlighting the Tourism Means Business campaign, which featured local business owners.

## Travel Show Presence

Attending travel shows allows VTC to go straight to potential visitors in our drive markets and connect with them one-on-one to provide personalized trip ideas. We are also able to talk with past visitors, hear their stories and spark a desire to visit Tuolumne County again.

- Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show, February 2020 (Attendees: 37,900+)
- Bay Area Travel and Adventure Show, March 2020: VTC was scheduled to attend with two booths and multiple VTC members, but the show was canceled

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## Social Media & Digital Content

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VTC has continued to increase an engaged social media following with the use of trustworthy content that is streamlined alongside the overall marketing messaging and campaigns for the destination. The efforts are showcased in the daily social media posts for active visitors, future visitors, and locals. Social media has elevated the credibility of VTC because of the consistent presence of reliable information, inspiring travel itineraries, and the promotion of VTC members.

When the Covid-19 shutdown first began in mid-March, all VTC's other marketing efforts were paused, and social media became the only way for VTC to keep Tuolumne County in front of potential visitors. Social media posts pivoted from promoting immediate, spring travel to sharing inspirational imagery and quotes, ideas for things to do at home such as watching movies that had been filmed in Tuolumne County, providing coloring sheets for kids who were now at home, and links to innovative virtual tours and activities that were being conducted by Yosemite National Park and Columbia State Historic Park staff, just to name a few examples.

As it became appropriate to do so, VTC began transitioning messaging towards future travel planning and promoting safe travel practices, which continued through the reopening of Yosemite National Park and lodging in mid-June.

Followers as of June 30, 2020:

Facebook: 5% increase in followers. 35,850+

Instagram: 27% increase in followers. 9,850+

### Digital Content

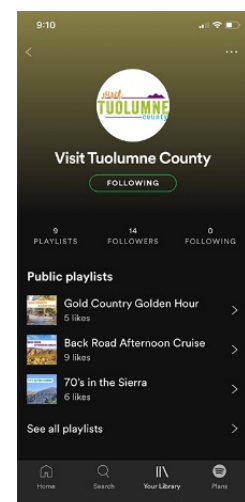
#### Blogs

Blog articles, created in-house, continue to amplify VTC's efforts to be a credible source for destination inspiration. These articles are useful in promoting an array of activities and members to target audiences, while reflecting overall campaign messaging. Blogs have been especially successful on VTC's Pinterest account.

#### Spotify

In June 2020, VTC started a Spotify account, a fun promotional tactic featuring multiple playlists for visitors to listen to while dreaming of or driving around Tuolumne County:

<https://open.spotify.com/user/qiwimtirt5i4zd76d1dw1ew>



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## Media Relations, Travel Trade and Meetings

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### Media Relations

In 2019-2020 public relations developed with an increase in media interest. This increase influenced more media trips to Tuolumne County and a spike in publications featuring Tuolumne County:

- 13 Press Releases Issued
- 20 Journalists hosted
- Over 100 (tracked) articles published featuring Tuolumne County

Go to [VisitTuolumne.com/press-room](https://www.visittuolumne.com/press-room) to view VTC press releases and articles about Tuolumne County.

### Travel Trade

Travel trade is used to describe organizations that operate as the intermediate between tourism destinations and the consumer. Travel trade representatives include travel agents, wholesalers, tour operators, and receptive tour operators. Travel trade connects the destination's products, such as hotels, restaurants, points of interest and activities, with the consumer. Destination representatives present the products to travel trade representatives, who then place the product to sell destination packages to the consumer.

Visit Tuolumne County increased its presence with the travel trade industry at the following events:

- US Commercial Services Access Asia: Featured briefings from US Foreign Services Officers to include key travel trends
- The National Travel Association's Travel Exchange: Over 25 one on one meetings with travel trade representatives and destination presentation.



### Meetings

VTC continued its meeting industry outreach by attending meeting trade shows, maintaining "Meet Me in Tuolumne" social media pages, and advertising in select meetings publications. VTC attended the California Society of Association Executives Seasonal Spectacular alongside Rush Creek Lodge. VTC engaged with several meeting planners at the event. VTC also attended the Northstar Meetings Group's Destination California event, where VTC had three days of networking and one day of dedicated one on one meetings with meeting planners who are interested in booking meetings in California.



California Society of Association Executives Seasonal Spectacular

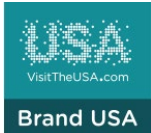


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## Strategic Marketing

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VTC partners with regional and state Destination Marketing Organizations to leverage funding and capture additional markets while increasing Tuolumne County's outreach regionally and internationally. Over the years VTC team members have built strong relationships on regional, state, national and international levels with each of these organizations. These relationships are key to Tuolumne County's tourism industry as they keep Tuolumne County top of mind with partners regionally, statewide and from around the world.



### **Brand USA:** Global Inspiration Program and Visit California Road Trip Co-Op

- Total VTC investment: \$16,125
- Quarter-page editorial in Visit the USA's Inspiration Guide (465,000 distributions in 40 countries and in 9 languages)
- 2-minute destination video creation with online promotion and distribution; featuring Sonora Pass, Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, Groveland, Pinecrest Lake, Columbia, Tuolumne Meadows
- Expedia Activation in UK including banner ads and landing page
- Postponed due to Covid-19 (additional investment \$45,000):
  - Inclusion in "Destination at a Glance" video series with talent hosted narration in three destinations of Tuolumne County
  - Digital Media Campaign targeted for Eastern Canada includes custom article on VisttheUSA.com custom hub, digital impressions, Facebook ads, Expedia activation



Brand USA Global  
Inspiration Guide  
editorial



### **Visit California-** A strategic partnership with Visit California provides exposure to Tuolumne County through multiple high-level familiarization (FAM) trips, increased media and

influencer visits and publications used by Visit California's domestic and international media teams.

- Publications: VTC submits monthly media ideas to Visit California. For the 2019-2020 year Visit California accepted and published seven media ideas to their domestic and international media outlets.
- VTC co-hosted three media trips with Visit California



### **San Francisco Travel Association-** The continued partnership with San Francisco Travel leverages travel to Tuolumne County from the Bay Area. San Francisco Travel promotes Tuolumne County as an extension to a Bay Area trip. VTC attended San Francisco Travel's Annual Luncheon with the opportunity to network with our Bay Area partners. VTC was invited by San Francisco Travel to a

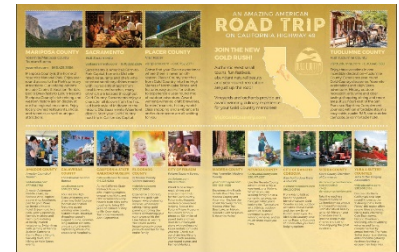
Bay Area Travel Writers' mixer, and VTC had the privilege of meeting and networking with many of the journalists.



### **Gold Country Visitors Association (GCVA)** - In 2019-2020 the GCVA secured Visit California's matching marketing grant of \$60,000. The GCVA continues to use the tagline, *An Amazing American Road Trip*, and touts the Gold Country as providing the best of California's history through hands-on, authentic experiences in historic towns along and around California's Gold Chain Highway 49. The Gold Country aligns with four of Visit California's experience pillars: Culinary, Entertainment & Culture, Family and Outdoors.

The fifth pillar is luxury and while there is some to be found in Gold Country it is not considered a key pillar for the region.

Planned marketing projects for the year included the California Visitors Guide, continued social media coordination, the Bay Area Travel & Adventure Show, Walkin' California (PBS Series hosted by Tuolumne County local, Steve Weldon), Visit California Canada Sales Mission, International Pow Wow (IPW), California Cup Sponsorship, DogTrekker.com and Public Relations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IPW, the California Cup, DogTrekker and the Public Relations assistance did not happen and some of those funds have been forwarded to the 2020-2021 year.



*The funding for the GCVA comes from a Visit California Grant that is applied for each year and from membership dues. VTC President & CEO, Lisa Mayo continues to serve as President of GCVA.*



**High Sierra Visitors Council (HSVC)** – The High Sierra Visitors Council (HSVC) continues to build its outreach in the French market, both on a travel trade and media level. France continues to be in the top five of VTC website international traffic origins. HSVC also maintains an active online presence through its website, [www.californiahighsierra.com](http://www.californiahighsierra.com), along with blogs and social media posts, created by “Local Freshies,” highlighting High Sierra destinations.

In Fall 2019, HSVC partners were given the opportunity to partake in a digital campaign with Visit USA Parks at a discounted rate. VTC was provided two Facebook posts, one Instagram post, one inspirational story (translated in German), three Facebook retargeting ads in English and German in the US, UK and Germany. The campaign resulted in:

- Impressions: 145.7k
- Engagement Rate: 23.2%
- Website leads generated from retargeting: 831

*The funding for the HSVC comes from a Visit California Grant that is applied for each year and from membership dues.*



**Yosemite Gateways** (not to be confused with Yosemite Gateway Partners) - is made up of the Destination Management/Marketing organizations from Madera, Mono, Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties. The group is charged with creating marketing to promote visiting Yosemite in off-peak times and using alternative transportation. The efforts of this group resulted in being awarded the first ever Destination Stewardship Poppy Award from Visit California.

*The effort is funded by Yosemite National Park.*

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## International Representation

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International Public Relations and Travel Trade Representation is a critical component of VTC's marketing programs. International visitors traditionally stay longer and spend more money in those destinations they visit. Yosemite National Park inspires many visitors to come to Tuolumne County but there are other gateways they can choose. Tuolumne County must maintain a competitive edge. It is important that our top international markets are informed about the many benefits of getting to Yosemite via Tuolumne County. Touting scenic drives, direct access to Yosemite, the ease of getting to Tuolumne County and all the great things to do in addition to visiting Yosemite such as visiting our State Parks, historic towns and High Sierra are key to winning the international traveler. The best way for VTC to do this is working with agencies that have boots on the ground in those international markets and have the experience and strategy to reach specific demographics through public relations and tour operator outreach.

### BLACK DIAMOND

**Black Diamond-** The strategic partnership with Black Diamond gives Tuolumne County a strong presence in the UK and Ireland markets. VTC entered a third year working with Black Diamond's public relations and travel trade teams and the fiscal year proved to be prosperous:



#### Public Relations

- Coverage: 49 pieces; highlights include Woman, House of Coco, Sunday Express, Sunday Mirror, Irish Sunday Mirror, Irish Daily Star, Fabulous Magazine, LoveEXPLORING, Yorkshire Times and Savour Magazine.
- Media Reach: 7,580,104
- Equivalent Advertising Value: \$237,547
- Press Trips: 11 media hosted in destination (8 Black Diamond/3 Visit California)
- Media due to visit (March - May) postponed due to Covid-19 and will be rescheduled as soon as travel ban is lifted to USA

#### Travel Trade

- Hosted a familiarization tour with Norwegian Airlines with four travel agents, one Black Diamond representative, and one Norwegian Airlines Representative (see photo)
- Visit California UK and Ireland carried out pub quizzes in different cities for California partners to take part.
  - Black Diamond attended a Quiz night in Southampton to promote Yosemite's Tuolumne County to the travel agents in the region.
- 30 agents who attended were introduced to the hidden gems of Northern California. Representatives from Visit Shasta Cascade, Visit Tri-Valley and Visit Tuolumne County hosted the quiz night with agents from Bon Voyage, STA Travel, Kuoni and Flight Centre were in attendance.
- Black Diamond attended the Visit USA Independence Day Ball 2019 at the Park Plaza Hotel Westminster. It is the number one event in the USA travel calendar in the UK.

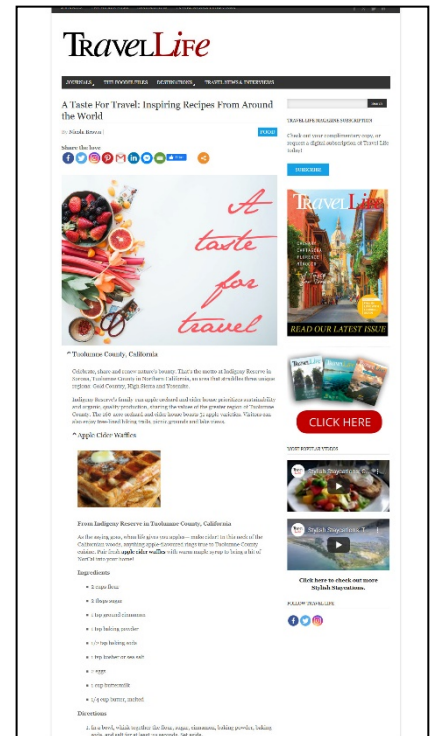


- Visit California UK bought several tables at the event and sublet the seats to key destinations. Adam Forsdike attended on behalf of Visit Tuolumne County and was able to network with over Tour Operators.
- Representative attended the 25th Travel Counsellors Conference representing Tuolumne County. As part of the package for the conference, Black Diamond hosted a table at the International Pow Wow sessions, which provided the team with the opportunity to speak with and influence Travel Counsellors attending the conference.
- The Travel Counsellors conference was a great success with nearly 2,000 attendees from seven countries and 410 trade partners supporting the event.
- In November Visit Tuolumne Hosted a Norwegian Airlines FAM to include Dominic Tucker, Head of UKI & Sales at Norwegian, Brendan Croft, Black Diamond Senior Account Manager, and four travel trade agents.
  - The fam included two nights in Tuolumne County and provided a fantastic opportunity to showcase the destination and its experiences for these agents, including a tour of Columbia State Historic Park, Railtown1897 State Park and Hetch Hetchy, which was a highlight for many.
- 515 Agents Trained, 6 Events attended, 7 Trade visited Tuolumne, and 43 meetings were held



**Development Counsellors International (DCI)** - Represents Tuolumne County in the Canadian Market with travel trade and public relations. VTC contracted with DCI for 10 months but the contract was cut short due to Covid-19. However, there were some great accomplishments in that time.

- Public Relations/Journalists
  - Earned Media Campaign Results
  - Return On Investment: 12:1
  - Impressions: 25,908,870
  - Advertising Equivalency: \$239,659
  - 34 published articles including these three that were secured during Covid-19:
    - Vancouver Courier, Sandra Thomas, [Bring the world to mom on this unusual Mother's Day](#)
    - Ottawa Life, Sofia Donato, A Taste For Travel: [Inspiring Recipes From Around the World](#)
    - TravelLife Magazine, Tammy Cecco, [Celebrating Earth Day during COVID-19 around the world](#)
- Travel Trade
  - Two Destination Webinar Trainings conducted: DCI build a webinar presentation, distributed invites to travel agents and secured participation. 68 agents trained.
  - Items that were scheduled but canceled due to Covid-19 include: Sales calls, Air Canada spring marketing program launch and a familiarization trip for five key travel companies.



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## Film Tuolumne County

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An exciting new partnership was formed when Film TC partnered with the Calaveras County Film Commission and created a Film Familiarization Tour with production managers. Unfortunately, this was scheduled for the middle of March and had to be postponed as the state went into lockdown. However, all production managers involved are excited to come to the area when it is safe to do so again and they have begun researching our area heavily. In the meantime, multiple filmmakers have scouted Tuolumne County, including one LA based studio looking to film around the county for their feature film. Despite Covid-19, filmmakers have consistently contacted the offices in hopes of using the county for filming and at the beginning of the current fiscal year Film TC worked with a filmmaker to produce an entire feature film completely filmed in Tuolumne County.

In the Fall of 2019 Film TC was proud to be a sponsor the California On Location Awards (aka COLA Awards) held in Universal City, Los Angeles. The COLA Awards honors the best location professionals in entertainment.



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## Industry Associations

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Visit Tuolumne County belongs to various industry associations, each with a specific purpose that is important to VTC. Purposes of these organizations include: Organization growth, professional growth, marketing outreach opportunities, tour operator meetings, journalist meetings, film industry connections and industry advocacy. These associations include the following:

- California Film Commission
- California Travel Association
- Destinations International
- Destination Marketing Association of the West
- Meeting Planners International
- National Tour Association
- Public Relations Society of America
- TravMedia
- US Travel Association
- Visit the USA – UK and Ireland

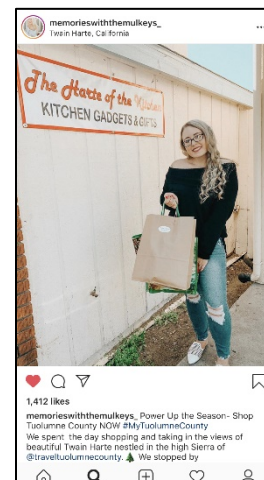
### PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs

The PG&E Public Safety Powers Shutoffs that occurred in October 2019 were another new challenge for businesses in Tuolumne County. VTC responded in numerous ways in order to assist visitors and local businesses.

VTC's crisis response included:

- Relaying 14 OES updates to members and staff during three high wind/PSPS events
- Creating and maintaining a running list of business operations to include businesses that were open and their status in regard to electricity, utilities, etc. This was distributed in VTC's local updates and on the VTC webpage for visitors
- Creating a resident/business facing webpage with appropriate PSPS talking points, resources specific to travel industry, news and safety resources, and business do's and don'ts
- Creating a visitor-facing webpage with updates about what to expect around Tuolumne County
- Recovery Campaign: *Power Up the Shopping Season, Shop in Tuolumne County NOW* campaign was launched to jump start holiday shopping at local businesses
  - October's PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs negatively impacted many Tuolumne County businesses. To assist businesses- in regaining revenue, VTC launched "Power Up the Shopping Season, Shop in Tuolumne County NOW." This effort was promoted on a local level through VTC social media platforms, VTC team members' social media accounts, and through banner ads on mymotherlode.com. The campaign along with promoting Tuolumne County's small towns and holiday atmosphere was amplified regionally with spots on Bay Area radio and print ads.

VTC also invited three local and regional influencers to shop, dine, stay, and explore the three corridors of Tuolumne County (Gold Country, High Sierra, and Yosemite). The influencers were contracted to do three social media posts, social media stories, and a blog post highlighting their time in Tuolumne County. Their posts and blogs were rich in content and instantly engaged their audiences, educating them on the shopping getaway opportunities in Tuolumne County.



## Covid-19 Pandemic

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown, Visit Tuolumne County took difficult steps to ensure the viability of our organization. The result was pausing all current and scheduled marketing, closing the Visitor Center, laying off nine of eleven staff which included: Four part-time Visitor Center staff, part-time Film Liaison, part-time Marketing Coordinator, part time Special Projects Coordinator, full-time Office Manager and full-time Tourism & Communications Manager. In June we brought back our Special Projects Coordinator at reduced hours, our part-time Marketing Coordinator and in September we were able to bring back our Tourism & Communications Manager on a two day/week basis.

On March 12, 2020, VTC's regional marketing efforts across television, radio, banner ads and social media advertising were paused as state stay-at-home mandates went into effect. Team members focused on relaying public health orders, announcements and press releases to members and stakeholders. Social media became the only outlet for continuing to keep Tuolumne County top-of-mind for future visitors and posts revolved around non-travel related activities and destination inspiration for future travel.

VTC's crisis response included:

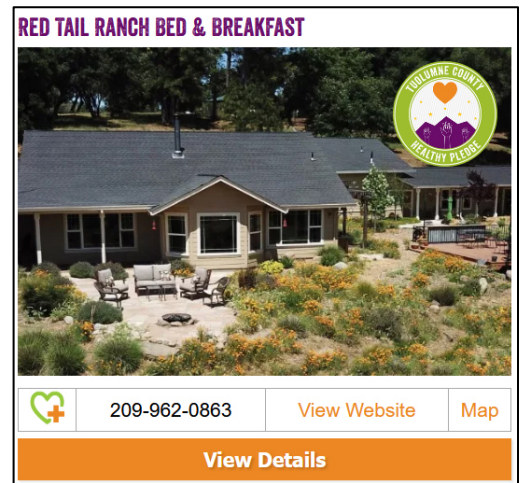
- Relaying (and continue to do so) urgent Tuolumne County Public Health press releases and health orders and business operations updates to members
- Sending information about financial assistance and other programs to members as they were released
- Providing (and continuing to do so) pertinent travel/tourism information, such as travel trends and traveler sentiment information, to members
- Pausing all out-of-county marketing (TV, radio, banner ads, scheduled consumer newsletters, etc.)
- Using social media platforms to share updates and inspiration for Tuolumne County, featuring activities that families could do at home, such as watching movies and TV shows that were filmed in Tuolumne County, coloring activities, virtual tours, and sharing virtual activities being produced by Yosemite National Park and Columbia State Historic Park
- Creating and maintaining an online running list of businesses that were open and their status in regard to safety guidelines
- Launching the *Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge* program:
  - In June, Visit Tuolumne County introduced the "Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge" program, Tuolumne County's local business commitment to creating and providing a clean, safe, and healthy environment for residents and visitors as businesses and organizations begin to reopen following COVID-19 restrictions. VTC staff consulted with Acting Tuolumne County Public Health Officer, Dr. Liza Ortiz for input on the program and its components.



The Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge is a voluntary program and awareness campaign for Tuolumne County businesses to showcase their commitment to clean and healthy standards for their guests and employees to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a priority recovery initiative, this free awareness program is being led by the Visit Tuolumne County team.

Research studies on traveler sentiment continue to show that visitors will go where they have confidence that the businesses within the destination are abiding by all new health and safety protocols. The Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge program will help build confidence among residents and visitors. With that, VTC is asking local businesses to voluntarily pledge to commit to the health and safety of all guests, customers and staff. This in turn will assist businesses with economic recovery.

- By taking the pledge businesses that are members of Visit Tuolumne County have a Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge icon displayed on their business listing at [www.visittuolumne.com](http://www.visittuolumne.com). An additional webpage dedicated to Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge lists all participating businesses (all Tuolumne County businesses are welcome). Each business may also list the basic protocols they are following. Businesses also gain access to additional marketing tools to help spread the word about their pledge and commitment to public health. Businesses are responsible for ensuring that they are abiding by all governmental and public health orders and directives. To date, over 60 businesses have taken the pledge.



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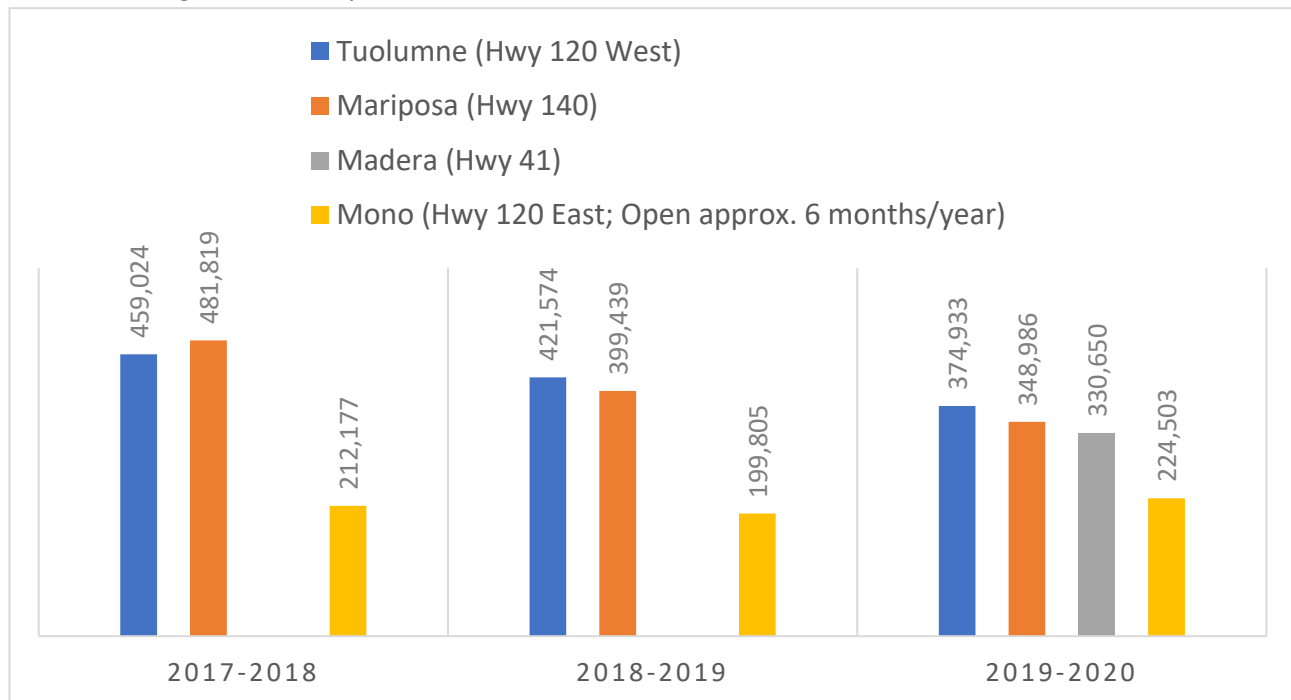
## Visitors, Membership, and Community

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### Yosemite Visitation

It is challenging to obtain the actual number of visitors that come into the County, however, Yosemite National Park provides monthly data for each of the gateways.

Traffic Entering Yosemite July 2019 – June 2020:



\*Madera is not represented in 2018-2019 and 2017-2017 due to unclear data.

### Membership

The partnerships formed with members enable the VTC to engage with them on a number of levels. VTC is a strong advocate for Tuolumne County and works to support local businesses by bringing the world to Tuolumne County. Throughout the year, VTC provides its members with multiple cooperative marketing opportunities that help members market their business at little to no cost. VTC also provides educational opportunities for its members, such as this year's Agritourism Summit. The VTC will also advocate for the industry on statewide and national levels. Most recently VTC has been advocating alongside many other destination marketing organizations across the U.S. to obtain federal economic relief for the tourism industry due to the negative economic effects that Covid-19 has had on the tourism industry.

VTC further supports members by providing a listing in the VTC Vacation Planner and website. Members are included with various fam trips including journalist visits and tour operator immersions. Lodging members receive direct booking referrals from the VTC website. Total members as of June 30, 2020: 302.



## Community & Marketing Sponsorships

Visit Tuolumne County has funding designated for local groups for the purposes of promoting their events or other marketing campaigns that drive tourism and overnight stays to Tuolumne County ideally during midweek and off-peak times. This year, recipients of those funds include:

- Summerville Bears Quarterback Club, Westside Brew Fest Sponsorship (July 2019)
- Twain Harte Chamber of Commerce, Event Sponsorship (Summer 2019)
- Yosemite Highway 120 Chamber of Commerce 49er Festival – Digital Sign and Event Sponsorship (September 2019)
- All Hallows Fantasy Faire, Sponsorship (October 2019)
- Sierra Repertory Theatre, Sponsored Season Brochures (2020 Season)
- Sonora Celtic Faire, Event Sponsor (March 2020)
- Tuolumne Adventure Trolley
  - VTC partners with Tuolumne County Transit to provide the FREE Tuolumne Adventure Trolley on Saturdays, May through September. VTC underwrites passenger fares and advertises the service.

VTC also sponsored 2020 events such as the Mother Lode Round-Up and Columbia Fireman's Muster but those events did not occur due to Coronavirus.

Numerous gift baskets, auction items and other donations were given for several causes over the last year.

## Community Involvement

- Lisa Mayo: Tuolumne County Historical Society Board of Directors, Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System Advisory Board, Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee, Tuolumne County Business Council Member, Sierra Repertory Theatre Board of Directors
- Jen Lopez: Leadership Tuolumne County Executive Committee, Yosemite Gateway Partners Board of Directors
- Bethany Wilkinson: Access Tuolumne Board of Directors
- Katie Kirkland: Leadership Tuolumne County Class, 2019-2020

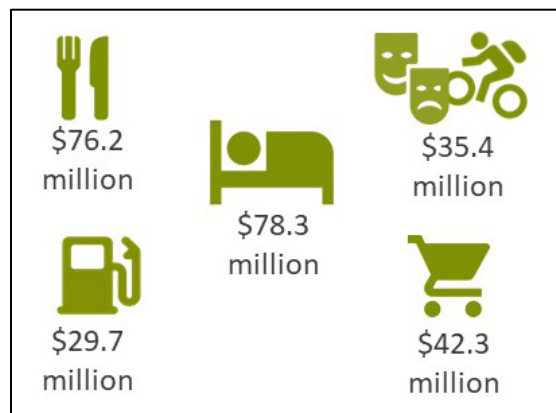
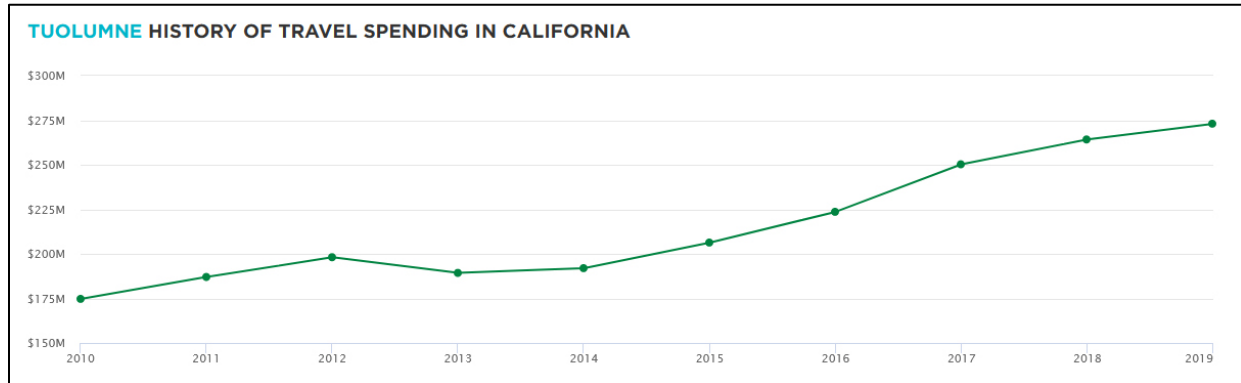
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**This is worth mentioning twice!**  
**Reiterating Tuolumne County's Incredible 2019 Tourism Stats**

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## 2019 Tuolumne County Overall Tourism Statistics

In 2019, Tuolumne County saw the 6<sup>th</sup> year in a row of increased visitor spending with 7% over 2018. California's state-wide increase in visitor spending was 3.2%.



Total Direct Travel Spending*	\$273 million
Tourism Industry Employment*	2,445
Government Revenue Generated by Tourism	
Local Sales Tax Receipts	\$9.3 million
State Sales Tax Receipts	\$11.7 million
Transient Occupancy Tax	\$5.2 million
State and local tax revenue equivalency per Tuolumne County household	\$960

\*These statistics do not include spending or job generation by either Black Oak Casino Resort or by Chicken Ranch Casino as they fall under Government. Casino employment estimated to be 1,500 plus. Reported by Dean Runyan Associates

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## Currently and Looking Ahead

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We continue to navigate uncharted waters. Funding and crisis uncertainties have us cautiously moving forward with an extremely strategic plan to focus first on California travel while dipping our toes back into the all-important international market so that we meet travel planning lead time for 2021 and 2022. All along we have been encouraging residents to support local business as well; this will remain a key priority.

The VTC budget is dependent on transient occupancy tax (TOT) therefore we anticipate a sharp decrease in funding directly linked to Covid-19 restrictions. The effects have been made greater as hotels had to implement a 24-hour waiting period between stays significantly cutting down on occupancy during what normally would be peak season. Fires, poor air quality and PG&E's Public Safety Power Shutoff events have all already had a negative effect on lodging and the tourism industry for the 2020-2021 year. Recent forest and Yosemite closures and visitor limitations have added to the challenges we have all faced this year.

On a bright note, we are seeing the tourism industry come back to life both locally and across the nation. Industry associations are starting to have virtual trade shows to help destinations gain visitation in 2021 and 2022. Locally, lodging properties are reporting that they are seeing international bookings for Summer 2021. This is a great sign of optimism about future travel. As a rural destination, Tuolumne County is well-positioned to make a strong come back in the tourism arena.

These past few months have highlighted how important the tourism industry is to Tuolumne County's economy. It supports and sustains many of our local businesses and community programs, provides employment and it offsets the taxes that we as residents pay. Tourism enhances the quality of life for our residents by sustaining our favorite restaurants, theatres, shops, events and so much more. The Visit Tuolumne County team continues to work hard for the tourism industry and for our community.

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## Visit Tuolumne County Board of Directors

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The all-volunteer Visit Tuolumne County Board of Directors is made up of tourism industry professionals, business owners and/or business leaders from throughout Tuolumne County. Board positions for lodging members are defined by Supervisorial Districts. Each District has a lodging representative, with the two largest lodging Districts (3 and 4) having two lodging representatives. The VTC Board also has seats for tourism attractions, restaurants, retail shopping and two at large members.

Non-voting representatives from the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, the Sonora City Council, Yosemite National Park and the U.S. Forest Service also regularly attend and give updates and input at Board meetings.

### 2019-2020 Visit Tuolumne County Board of Directors:

Chair – Margaret Davis, Junction Shopping Center

Vice Chair – Mark Truppner, Clarke Broadcasting

Treasurer – Katie Fromm, Dodge Ridge Ski Area

#### *Directors:*

District 1 - Katie Dunn, The Carriage House on Barretta, Airbnb

District 2 - Launa Valente, Lazy Z Resort

District 3 – Amanda Silacci, Black Oak Casino Resort

District 3 - Stephanie McCaffrey, McCaffrey House Bed & Breakfast

District 4 - Teri Marshall, Evergreen Lodge and Rush Creek Lodge

District 4 - Kathy Hakl, Best Western PLUS Sonora Oaks Hotel & Conference Center

District 5 - Rhiannon Montgomery, Central Valley District, California State Parks

Betsy Hurst-Younger, Century 21 Wildwood Properties

Judy Grossman, Brush and Cork

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## Visit Tuolumne County Management and Accountability Practices

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Visit Tuolumne County follows industry and business best practices. To this end, VTC is affiliated with the following professional organizations:

- California Film Commission
- California Travel Association
- Destinations International
- Destination Marketing Association of the West
- Meeting Planners International
- National Tour Association
- US Travel Association
- Visit California

VTC President and CEO, Lisa Mayo, retains her Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) status. This is the tourism industry's highest individual educational achievement. To achieve this designation a series of courses must be taken, and course papers written along with a final that dives deep into an area of destination management. The courses provide a broad knowledge base and provide a multi-disciplinary perspective to problem solving and destination management.

This past year VTC renewed its Destination Management Accreditation Program (DMAP) designation through Destinations International. This program serves as a visible industry distinction that defines numerous quality and performance standards in destination marketing and management. In addition, VTC has an independent financial audit or review annually conducted by a Certified Public Accountant.

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### Visit Tuolumne County Team

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The Visit Tuolumne County Team has gone through major changes this year. While some of the team members listed below are no longer with us due to being laid off because of Covid-19, the commitment to our mission and to our community remains strong.

#### Visit Tuolumne County Team:

(as of beginning of 2019-2020 year)

##### Full Time:

Lisa Mayo, CDME, President & CEO

Jennifer Lopez, Marketing Manager

Katie Kirkland, Communications & Tourism Manager

Debbe Pallante, Office & Membership Manager

##### Part Time:

Anna Davies, Special Programs Coordinator

Bethany Wilkinson, Film Liaison

Sarah Spoljaric, Marketing Coordinator

Diane Rock, Visitor Services

Richard Haratani, Visitor Services

Kate Greene, Visitor Services

Dave Gookin, Visitor Services

##### Contract:

Ginger Malatesta, Bookkeeper

Tourism is more important than ever to Tuolumne County.

Thank You for your continued support!