



visit  
**TUOLUMNE**  
county  
YOSEMITE • GOLD COUNTRY • HIGH SIERRA  
CALIFORNIA

2021/2022

# Marketing Plan

Visit Tuolumne County (VTC) is a 501c6 non-profit Destination Marketing and Management Organization (DMMO) whose primary role is to position and market Tuolumne County as an easily accessible year-round visitor destination for leisure travelers and the meetings industry as a means of increasing the visitor economy, which is good for the entire community. VTC is the advocacy and promotional voice for Tuolumne County's tourism industry, which is the number one private sector industry in the County, for both large and small businesses whose existence depends on tourism.

### **GUIDING STATEMENTS:**

**Mission Statement:** To enhance Tuolumne County's visitor economy through tourism.

**Community Statement:** Visit Tuolumne County supports the community through the Community Investment Program. The VTC team members take pride in being part of Tuolumne County by taking an active role in a vibrant and successful community.

**Strategic Statement:** To align with Destination Marketing and Management Organization (DMMO) trends, the VTC takes an active role in industry conferences, continued education, multi-year planning, strategic partnerships, and industry advocacy.

**Vision Statement:** VTC is the premiere authority for marketing Tuolumne County's tourism assets and plays a key role in crisis communications, crisis recovery and destination stewardship.

**Inspiration Statement:** The VTC team is passionate about and inspired by High Sierra Adventures, Yosemite Explorations, and Gold Country Discoveries.

### **THE VTC TEAM**

#### **2020-2021 Board of Directors:**

- Katie Dunn – Chairperson, Represents District 1 Lodging: Airbnbs of Tuolumne County
- Judy Grossman - Vice Chairperson, At-Large: JG Designs & Brush & Cork
- Stephanie McCaffrey – Treasurer, Represents District 3 Lodging: McCaffrey House Bed & Breakfast
- Launa Valente, Represents District 2 Lodging: Lazy Z Resort
- Alison Daniels, Represents District 3 Lodging: Century 21 Wildwood Properties
- Kathy Hakl, Represents District 4 Lodging: Best Western Plus Sonora Oaks Hotel & Conference Center
- Teri Marshall, Represents District 4 Lodging: Rush Creek Lodge/Evergreen Lodge
- Rhiannon Montgomery, Represents District 5 Lodging: Columbia State Historic Park Lodging
- Zac Broxham, Local Collective
- Jeff Hauff, Dodge Ridge Ski Area/Dodge Ridge Campgrounds
- Ryan Reis, Don Pedro Recreation Agency
- Scott Viets, Sierra Repertory Theatre



The VTC staff is currently comprised of three full-time and five part-time staff:

- Lisa Mayo, CDME, President & CEO
- Jennifer Lopez, Marketing Manager
- Sarah Spoljaric, Creative Content & Social Media Manager
- Monique Holcomb, Administrative Assistant
- Anna Davies, Special Programs Coordinator
- Diane Rock, Visitor Services
- Richard Haratani, Visitor Services
- Contract: Ginger Malatesta, Bookkeeper

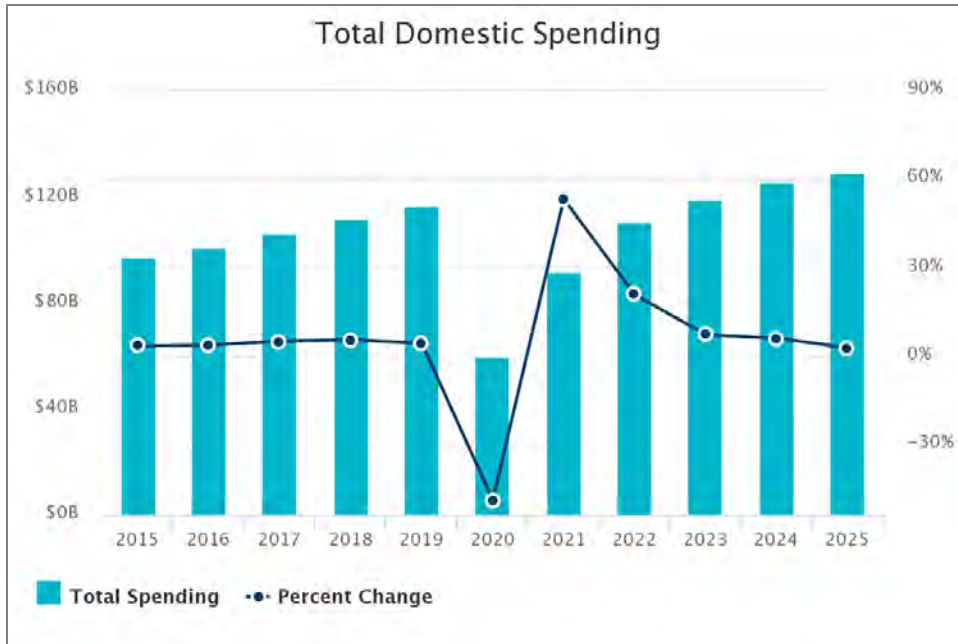
### **CALIFORNIA TRAVEL-RELATED SPEND FORECAST (JUNE 2021 UPDATE FROM VISIT CALIFORNIA)**

Forecast of traveler spending in California with a five-year outlook for the state.

Major takeaways for domestic and international travel spend:

- Tourism spending in California dropped to \$65.10 billion in 2020, only 45% of the 2019 amount. The last time tourism spending in California was below \$60 billion was 1996.
- Travel-related spending from Domestic visitors is expected to recover to 78.5% of 2019 levels in 2021, while international spending will only recover to 30.8%.
- Total travel-related spending in California is not expected to reach pre-coronavirus levels until 2024.
- Overall, Leisure travel (person trips) could recover to 81.2% of 2019 volume in 2021, while Business-related travel will only recover to 42.7%.





**YEAR-TO-DATE TRANSIENT OCCUPANCY TAX UPDATE FOR TUOLUMNE COUNTY, 2021**  
 (as of July 2021)

For Quarter 1, 2021, Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) came in at 42% more compared to the same quarter in 2019, which was a really strong year with receipts being the most ever seen. Preliminary estimates indicate that Quarter 2, 2021 is on track to exceed the same quarter in 2019 by nearly 15%, which is great news on the recovery front and we believe the efforts and resiliency of Tuolumne County’s tourism industry have helped spur this incredible comeback.



## THE MARKETING PLAN

VTC's 2021-2022 budget outlines various marketing programs to invite visitors to come to Tuolumne County for road trips and multi-day, off-peak stays. Marketing is at the very core of the role of VTC. How we market the destination changes on a regular basis and an allowance to keep up with those changes is incorporated into the budget. At the same time, there are traditional marketing programs that VTC continues to embrace and those, too, are reflected in the budget. VTC leverages marketing dollars at every relevant opportunity. An illustration of this can be seen in the Tourism Ecosystem graphic as VTC partners with each entity outlined, taking advantage of their much larger budgets and industry tested marketing programs.



It is especially noteworthy that VTC is now able to be more competitive by marketing internationally. International visitors are important as they stay longer and spend more money at the destination. The goal with international marketing is to focus in on two to three international markets that are attainable and prime to increase visitation. VTC will make decisions based on airlift and Visit California's noted trends and opportunities. VTC has retained representation in the UK, Black Diamond, to help establish Tuolumne County as a new product and add-on to Yosemite travelers.

### Wander Freely – Umbrella Campaign

The Wander Freely campaign continues through 2021-2022, and will continue to pivot as needed to welcome visitors during periods when travel is allowed throughout the state. The goal of the 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 targets nearby drive market residents in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Greater Sacramento area. While the primary objective is to increase visitation, travel spending, and overnight stays, the messaging needs to be sensitive to what the audience has recently been through. The creative inspires people through imagery and copy that evokes emotion and communicates the authentic personality of the destination and its key assets.

## Advertising (In-House)

Much of VTC's advertising budget falls under Augustine Agency, but there is a portion that is allocated to in-house buys. VTC team members have had great working experience with representatives from the various print, television, and radio outlets for a number of years, which allows for flexibility and trust.

- **Digital:** VTC creates and purchases digital ads in-house within the local market. These include promotion for, but not limited to:
  - Shop Local - December
  - Tuolumne County Restaurant Week – January
  - Tuolumne County Art Week - April
  - National Travel and Tourism Month/California Tourism Week – May
- **Print:** Print advertising in key national, regional, and local publications remains relevant and important. These print publications, along with the digital content that goes along with them, have proven to be key lead generators--their readers and followers ultimately showing interest in Tuolumne County request or view the Inspiration Travel Guide by the thousands annually and/or visit the VTC website. Some print activations provide opportunities for VTC members to participate in economical pay to play co-op opportunities. Publications that we will run ads include, but are not limited to:
  - *Sunset Magazine* – July and September
  - *California Road Trips Guide* – Annual; released in July
  - *California Visitors Guide* – Annual; released in January
  - *Yosemite Journal* – Annual; released in January

Digital ads, social media posts and email sponsorships are also included in integrated programs in conjunction with print ads listed above.

- **Television:** VTC's television spots have previously run fall through early winter and we are anticipating that to be the case again this year; the details are still to be determined. We look forward to working in partnership with KRON4 in San Francisco and ABC 10 in Sacramento as well as others, as we did last year to focus not only on leisure travel segments, but also on segments geared toward groups and meetings.
- **Radio:** VTC's radio spots will run in the fall on stations that are qualified by VTC's target audiences.

## Augustine Agency

VTC has secured Augustine Agency and advertising and public relations agency in early 2020. It was quickly realized how key its team was to help us navigate through the volatility of the pandemic and



they assisted with the creation of the Wander Freely advertising campaign, the Trail Heads Program and many other projects in the 2019-2020 year.

Augustine will continue to create new products and content in the upcoming year including a new Meetings and Event Planning Guide (which includes meetings, weddings, and event venue plus event services information), a winter version of the Trail Heads program, sustainability and Instagrammable locations public relations activations, and more. MAHK, a partner of Augustine is responsible for purchasing and distribution of digital ads, paid social, paid search, and paid emails to VTC's target markets. Some of these purchases are part of Visit California's Leveraged Media Co-op opportunities, which help VTC to extend marketing funds.

### Community Relations

VTC is committed to helping maintain a vibrant, exciting, and beautiful place to live, work, and play.

- **Community Investment Program** (Community Partnerships and Destination Development): VTC has a long history of supporting non-profit and for-profit events within Tuolumne County either through marketing funds or sponsorships. The Community Investment Program (CIP) creates a formal avenue for VTC to support local events or other destination activities by reinvesting dollars into those activities that support the VTC mission. The CIP is intended for projects that attract out of town visitors, drive overnight stays, generate a strong visitor economy midweek and during off-peak times in addition to enhancing overall experiences for both visitors and locals.
- **Stewardship and Sustainability:** With new types of visitors coming to recreate in the outdoors, who have never recreated outdoors comes an increased need for educational messaging on proper etiquette and adventuring responsibly. VTC's draft Sustainability and Stewardship Plan spells out objectives for encouraging responsible behavior. The plan is based on five pillars:
  - Protect the environment and cultural/historical resources, and regional identity
  - Protect and enhance resident quality of life
  - Foster a vibrant economy
  - Provide for an excellent visitor experience
  - Ensure enjoyment by future generations

From in-office initiatives such as adding more plants, practicing proper recycling procedures, and sharing sustainable and responsible messaging across all platforms for visitors, the VTC team is not only sharing the message but living by it. It is also woven into the Wander Freely campaign with standards of dispersing crowds and encouraging visitors to adventure responsibly.



## Digital Content Development and Social Media

Looking forward overall in this category, VTC will continue many trends from the 2020-2021 year such as showing less crowded areas, hidden gems, and promoting health and safety and sharing wildfire and stewardship messaging. The team will highlight the businesses of Tuolumne County through interviews, photos, and video and highlight the resiliency of the County.

For social media, video and “story” platforms, like TikTok, are continuing to grow and gain traction. Followers, especially those interested in travel, are searching for authentic content. VTC is in a great position and has an extremely engaged audience who trusts its content.

- **Platforms:** In 2021, VTC signed on with CrowdRiff, a User Generated Content collection platform as part of a recovery co-op with Visit California. This platform allows us to easily find, ask for usage rights, and utilize consumers’ relevant social media images and videos for our own marketing efforts.
- **Social Media Influencer:** Social media influencers are experts in their interests and have huge followings of engaged people on social media platforms. DMMOs invite influencers to their destination to experience it and share their experience.
- **Email:** Potential visitors are invited to sign up for a VTC monthly e-newsletter. Emails are a great, cost-effective way to directly reach those potential visitors who have already shown an interest in Tuolumne County. It is also a perfect platform for inviting visitors with a specific call to action.
- **Social Media:** Posts that show less crowded situations and that feature hidden gems and the outdoors to help disperse crowds and offer safety messaging is a trend that came out of COVID-19 and will continue. Looking forward, VTC is able to highlight the businesses of Tuolumne County even more through interviews, photos, and video. VTC wants to continue to support and highlight Tuolumne County’s resiliency to visitors all over the world through social media.

Through conferences, webinars, and research, VTC team members are very knowledgeable about current trends and all things social media.

## Dues and Subscriptions:

VTC relies on many industry organizations to further the growth of the organization and to stay informed on the latest marketing trends and technology. Some associations provide direct industry trade leads that enables VTC to grow their database and outreach. Some associations provide an advocacy benefit while others give us a direct platform for promoting Tuolumne County. VTC is actively involved in all associations belonged to or subscriptions that are maintained.

## Public Relations

Recognizing public relations as a vital component to marketing outreach, VTC plans to increase PR efforts after a reduction due to the pandemic and amplifying messaging to journalists who can best tell the Tuolumne County story to potential visitors. This includes enlisting the assistance of VTC’s partners, Augustine Agency and Black Diamond, a UK based marketing and public relations agency.





Both agencies develop and create compelling press releases, proactively pitch media, and attend media events on VTC's behalf.

### Regional Co-op Marketing

VTC continues to be active members of two Visit California-sanctioned regional marketing groups: The Gold Country Visitors Association (GCVA) and the High Sierra Visitors Council (HSVC). In addition, the VTC is part of the Yosemite Gateway Destinations.

- **Gold Country Visitors Association and High Sierra Visitors Council:** These two groups are comprised of multiple DMOs within the representative regions. Both organizations are funded by Visit California grants. Some of the examples of marketing projects within those groups are advertisements in the California Visitors Guide, contracting with international marketing firms, maintaining digital content on websites, blogs and social media accounts, and hosting media and influencers.  
\*Note that Lisa Mayo, VTC's President and CEO is President of the Gold Country Visitors Association.
- **Yosemite Destination Partners:** Comprised of the DMMOs of the four Yosemite-surrounding counties and opportunities with this group, such as influencer visits, further extend VTC's ability to promote visiting lesser-known areas and visiting during off-peak times to manage visitor flow as part of the Sustainability and Stewardship Plan.

### Research

Beginning this year VTC is participating in a new data platform, Madden Voyage, that will provide up-to-the minute (and otherwise difficult to secure) tourism data and reporting tools. The data accessible includes marketing performance and insights, visitor intelligence data, competitor intelligence, and economic data. This data will allow the VTC team to make the best-informed decisions for marketing placement by better understanding where visitors come from, where they go, their travel patterns, etc.

### Special Promotions

- **Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge:** The Tuolumne County Healthy Pledge will continue as safe and healthy travel options remain important to visitors. The Healthy Pledge stands on its own, however there will be a need for restocking Healthy Pledge window clings and other promotional materials.
- **Tuolumne County Restaurant Week:** In 2020, Tuolumne County Restaurant Week showed promise to expand in the coming year, however it was drastically diminished due to Covid restrictions in 2021. For 2022 we plan to recapture the momentum of 2020 and further promote Tuolumne County dining options and VTC's partners by incorporating lodging packages, increased advertising, etc.



- **Tuolumne County Art Week:** VTC hosted the first annual Tuolumne County Art Week in April 2021, coinciding with California's Arts, Culture, & Creativity Month. Local artists, art-related organizations and businesses that promote the arts are invited to participate in the promotional campaign. Throughout the week, there are specials, deals, activities, demonstrations, and more offered by local artists, art shops and galleries which VTC promotes on the website and on social media. This year VTC will continue to collaborate with Tuolumne County Arts to grow the celebration.
- **National/State Tourism Month/Week:** Every year VTC spends a considerable amount of budget on digital and radio ads to promote National Travel and Tourism Week and California Tourism Month. Based on national and state campaigns, the messaging of the month revolves around awareness of the importance of tourism in the County

### Strategic Partnerships

VTC also partners with regional, state, national and international marketing organizations. These partnerships allow VTC to leverage funding and capture additional markets to keep the county top of mind regionally, statewide and around the world.

- **Brand USA:** VTC partners with Brand USA to produce and distribute international content through various multi-channel programs, such as Expedia and Facebook, which focus strictly on Western Canada and others are distributed in several countries. We have a carry-over from the previous year to activations that are on hold due to the pandemic, but there is budget set aside for additional opportunities in the coming year.
- **Visit California:** VTC's partnership with Visit California provides exposure through multiple high-level familiarization (FAM) trips, increased media and influencer visits and publications used by Visit California's domestic and international media teams. Every year, we participate in matching fund co-op advertising opportunities and discounted programs such as TripAdvisor and Crowdriff put forth by VCA.
- **San Francisco Travel Association:** In 2021/2022, VTC is participating in "Our Gates Are Open" European integrated digital campaign targeting U.K., Germany and France core markets. The campaign includes an interactive microsite, partner page within the microsite, video display advertising, and more.

### Travel Shows and Conventions

- **Consumer Shows:** VTC continues to evaluate the effectiveness of travel shows for the leisure market. Previously we attended the Travel and Adventure Shows in the drive markets, the Bay Area and Los Angeles. This year VTC will continue its travel show attendance with two VTC booths at the Bay Area Travel Show (in the Gold Country and Yosemite sections) in October and as part of a co-op booth with the Gold Country Visitors Association in Los Angeles in March.



- **Travel Trade Shows:** VTC participates in several travel trade shows, allowing for face-to-face meetings and relationship-building opportunities with travel agents and tour operators from its core national and international markets. These shows include National Tour Association (NTA), Go West Summit, and U.S. Travel Association's IPW, the leading inbound travel trade show.

## Travel Trade

Travel trade targets tour operators, travel agents and meeting planners to increase group tourism. The meetings market initiative focuses on promoting and increasing midweek and off-peak season occupancy. To track meetings VTC provides meeting planners with an incentive for utilizing VTC and its resources for the planning of their first meeting. Meeting planners like working with destination marketing organizations (DMMOs) to assist in booking their events due to the complete information that the DMMO can provide on the area. Advertising in various meeting planner outlets, participating in meeting planner events and continuing to be a member of Meeting Planners International Northern California Chapter will help elevate the knowledge that meeting planners have about Tuolumne County. VTC has a dedicated Meet Me in Tuolumne Facebook page and Pinterest board. VTC continues to be aligned with successful practices of meeting planners.

The Travel Trade category of the budget is dedicated to tour operator and travel agent outreach. This category also includes travel trade familiarization tours, advertisement opportunities with top tour companies and international travel agent trainings through Black Diamond.

- **Black Diamond Public Relations:** The strategic partnership with Black Diamond gives Tuolumne County a strong presence in the UK and Ireland markets. VTC's partnership with Black Diamond's public relations and travel trade teams prove to be prosperous.
- **FAM – Meetings and Travel Trade:** VTC ensures there is funding to host meeting planners, tour operators and journalists.
- **Group Meeting Incentives:** VTC provides a financial incentive for groups staying/booking a certain amount of room nights by way of a sponsored breakfast or lunch for the group.
- **VCA Travel Trade Event:** Another partnership opportunity with Visit California allowing for

## Vacation Planner

The Tuolumne County Inspiration Travel Guide (formerly the Tuolumne County Vacation Planner) is a staple of VTC's marketing efforts. It is distributed in key locations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, through direct requests, and by the VTC members. Pre Covid-19, 100,000 copies of the planner were printed and distributed. In 2021 it was reduced to 50,000 and an additional 10,000 copies were ordered due to demand. There is also an online version available. In 2022 VTC is planning to print 75,000 copies and increase the page count back to historical numbers.

According to data from the *Crowd riff DMO Visitor Guide Readership and Conversion Study* by Destination Analysts and the DMA West Education and Research Foundation, visitors guides remain relevant to those researching destinations and planning trips. In general, attractions, maps, and



travel tips are at the top of the list when it comes to content sought by readers. VTC was a participant in this study and was found to have the largest proportion of visitors who were potentially convertible by the visitors guide out of the 12 DMMO participants.

### Website and Mobile Technology

The VTC website, maintained by Drozian Webworks who also manages the SEO, engages potential and returning visitors with member listings, blogs, things to do, places to eat and places to stay. When travelers are ready to book their stay, they can do so right on the website. An embedded booking referral engine allows travelers to book directly with VTC member lodging establishments of all kinds. This platform is paid for by VTC annually and is free to its lodging partners.

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Thank you to Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and the Sonora City Council for continued support of Tuolumne County's tourism industry by continuing to fund the marketing programs of Visit Tuolumne County.

