

visit
TUOLUMNE
county
★CALIFORNIA★



2022-2024

2 - Year Strategic Plan

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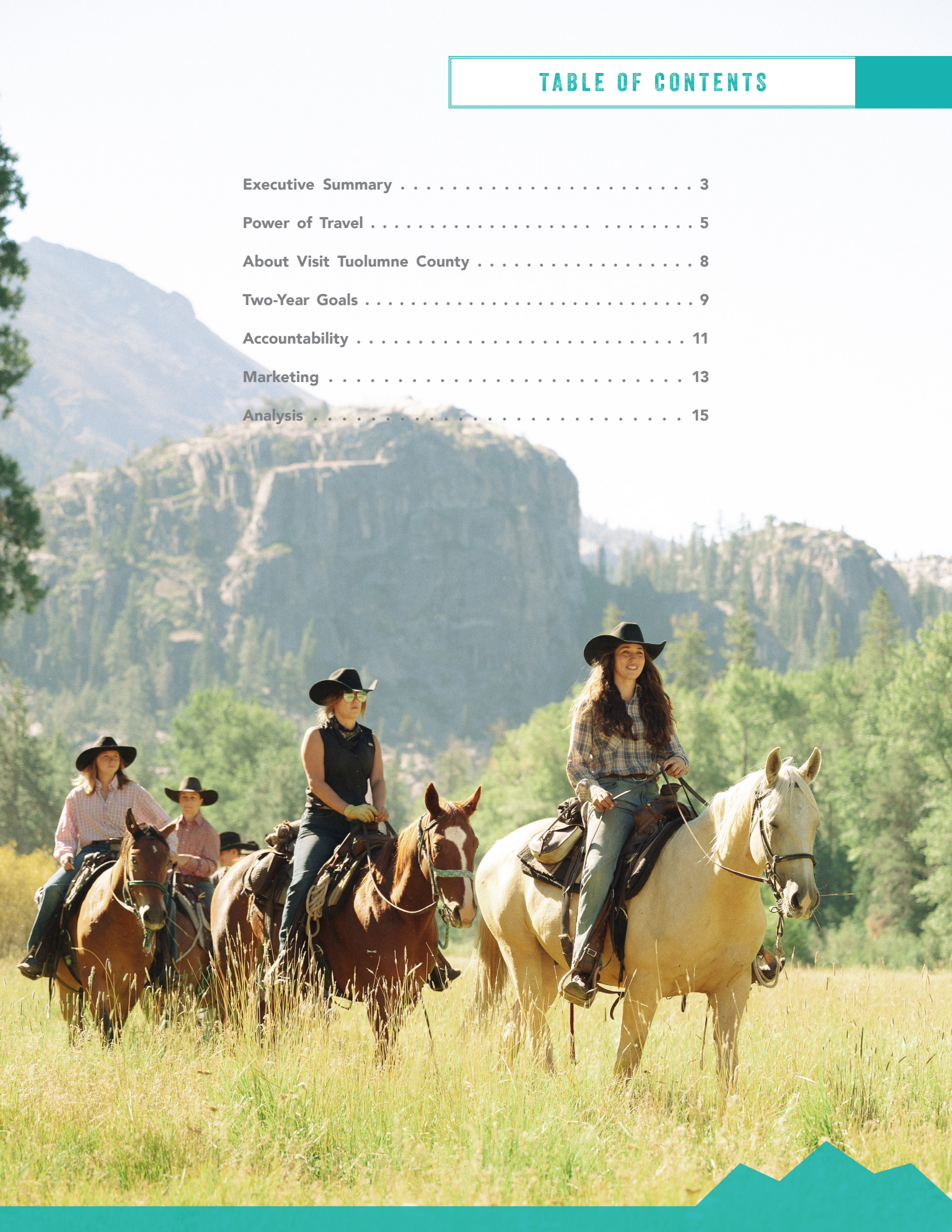
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Building off strong momentum from 2021 Visit Tuolumne County continues to strategically expand current domestic and global marketing programs to bring high-quality visitors into the County. These visitors stay longer and spend more money at the destination. They are most likely to travel here because they have been invited and that is where Visit Tuolumne County comes in.

We've been marketing to travelers for 40 years. In recent years, our work has been a key driver for economic recovery following crises, whether it be a wildfire, government shutdown, or even a pandemic. We have embarked on responsible travel initiatives in the hopes of preventing a crisis like wildfire. Additionally, we continue to educate visitors on destination stewardship practices.

Tourism is Tuolumne County's largest private sector industry and brings hundreds of millions of new dollars into the County every year. This money supports our families, friends, and neighbors directly and indirectly. Transient occupancy tax (TOT) is paid by overnight visitors and is the only tax that stays 100% local. It represents new dollars into the County that support important community services like Sheriff, fire, roads, and libraries. In 2021, taxes paid by visitors equaled \$967 per Tuolumne County household. Visit Tuolumne County is proud to be a significant driver in the growth of TOT, sales tax, and travel spending dollars.

Status and Opportunity

Visit Tuolumne County is a prime influencer for maintaining and increasing visitation to Tuolumne County. Our success comes from staying up to date on industry trends and research and by building relationships throughout the industry. Our creative campaigns are strategically aimed at various target markets resulting in a consistent growth of transient occupancy tax and travel spending and rapid economic rebounds following times of crises.

There are many opportunities to increase tourism. Filling lodging rooms during off-peak visitation periods which include shoulder season and midweek is a key focus and ramping up this program will mean more transient occupancy tax, sales tax, and travel spending within our County. Additionally, new lodging properties will be adding new inventory that will need to be filled.

Expanding domestic markets is another opportunity. We've had terrific success in several out-of-state markets. We strategically lined up flight information like cost and non-stop service with various target markets that we saw already coming here. This resulted in a jump in visitation from those markets, in some cases doubling.

Expanding international markets is an excellent opportunity to gain market share from places like Germany and Scandinavia. Through Visit California's research and partnerships with many countries around the globe, we can identify which markets would be most effective for us to market to and we have options to leverage marketing dollars by joining Visit California and Brand USA in their international efforts.

Visit Tuolumne County has taken on a role in destination stewardship and sustainability by creating responsible travel messaging that is woven throughout many campaigns and by hosting clean-up days in the County. Elevating stewardship and sustainability efforts is an opportunity to help make Tuolumne County a better place for everyone. One example is working with Leave No Trace to help us navigate our leadership role in destination stewardship. This would offer a much bigger platform when it comes to promoting responsible travel.

The Visit Tuolumne County Community Investment Funds program that we run through Sonora Area Foundation is another way we support community events, marketing programs and destination development. Some of these include The Groveland Grind bike ride, Ferretti Trails development, Sierra Repertory Theatre sponsorship, In Focus Photography Competition and Exhibition, and the Westside Tribute Band Brew Fest.

Plan and Overall Goal

The Visit Tuolumne County Strategic Plan outlines a path for continued growth in the tourism industry that validates the effectiveness and importance of the work of Visit Tuolumne County. This should ultimately create a seamless structure for continued funding support through the transient occupancy tax, currently the primary funding source for Visit Tuolumne County.

The plan includes Visit Tuolumne County's critical role in driving economic growth by making Tuolumne County a top-of-mind destination for travelers. It also includes initiatives for the growth of off-peak visitation and responsible travel. To help us be able to achieve our goals Visit Tuolumne County needs to work towards a sustainable supplemental funding mechanism. A feasibility study will be done to determine if it might be the right time for a Tourism Marketing District for Tuolumne County.

Anticipated Outcomes

Outcomes include a vibrant and healthy tourism economy for Tuolumne County that supports the funding for essential services, while also providing funds for continued marketing. That marketing includes building on current successful campaigns and taking part in emerging opportunities. Expanded markets will bring new awareness and inspire visitation to Tuolumne County.

Tuolumne County is a treasure to all who live and visit here. An outcome of this plan is that visitors will be better educated about preventing wildfires and traveling responsibly. Keeping Tuolumne County pristine will ensure a better experience for all, including residents. VTC's role in destination stewardship and sustainability continues to grow.

Sustainable funding is critical to the success of Visit Tuolumne County and the County's tourism industry. A supplemental funding source in the form of a Tourism Marketing District will ensure Visit Tuolumne County has secured funds and can plan for the future. We must continue to invite people to Tuolumne County. Tourism is the biggest economic driver we have that affects so many people both directly and indirectly. It is critical to our economy, to essential services, and to so many of our residents and their businesses, that Tuolumne County's tourism industry thrives.

THE POWER OF TRAVEL

Tourism is Tuolumne County’s largest private-sector industry and plays a vital role in economic development. Hundreds of millions of dollars of travel spending generate revenue for tourism and non-tourism-related businesses and provides thousands of job opportunities. State and local sales taxes and transient occupancy taxes generated by tourism deliver a sustainable source of revenue to help meet the needs of the community, such as public safety, infrastructure, recreational areas, and other services. These services enhance the health, wellbeing, and enrichment for the individuals and families of Tuolumne County and create an attractive destination, one where people may choose to live, start a business, buy a second home, and more.

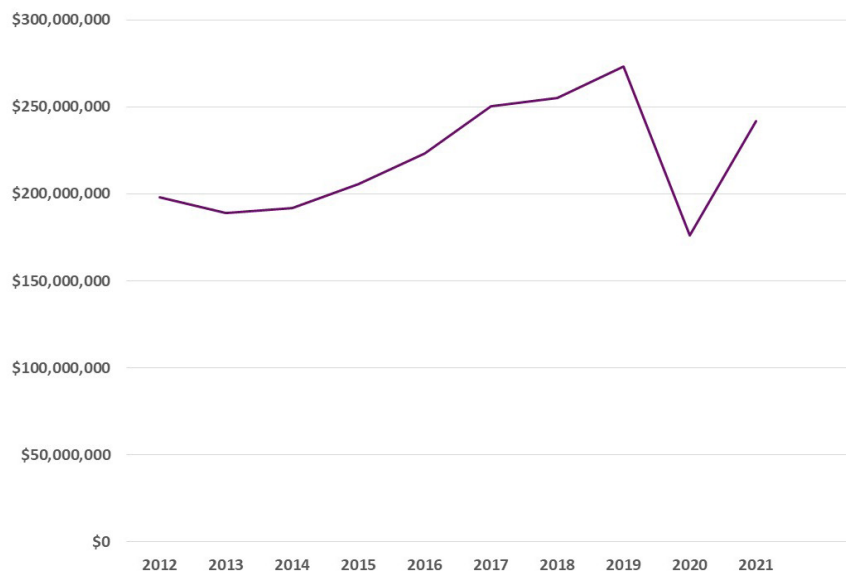
Residents benefit financially from tourism. Taxes generated by tourism, which help pay for essential public services, were equivalent to each Tuolumne County household paying an additional \$967 in taxes in 2021. Yearly, tourism tax revenue saves money for local taxpayers.

When it comes to economic recovery Visit Tuolumne County’s efforts have proven over and over that tourism promotion plays a critical role in economic recovery and even growth following large challenges, such as wildfires, floods, government shutdowns, and even a pandemic.



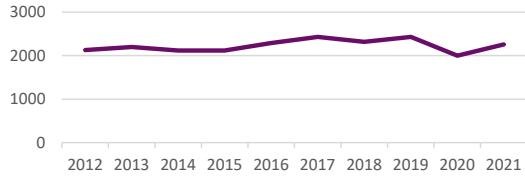
The following statistics are from the 2021 Dean Runyan Associates research that is commissioned through Visit California. Stats for the previous year are released annually during National Travel and Tourism Week which takes place the first week of May. These stats are specific to Tuolumne County.

Travel Spending in Tuolumne County
(Calendar Year)



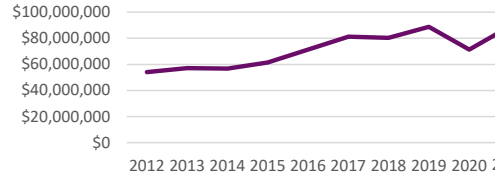
2021 Travel Spending: \$241 million
2019 (record year): \$274 million

Travel-Related Employment
(Calendar Year)



2021 Employment: 2,260
2019 (record year): 2,430

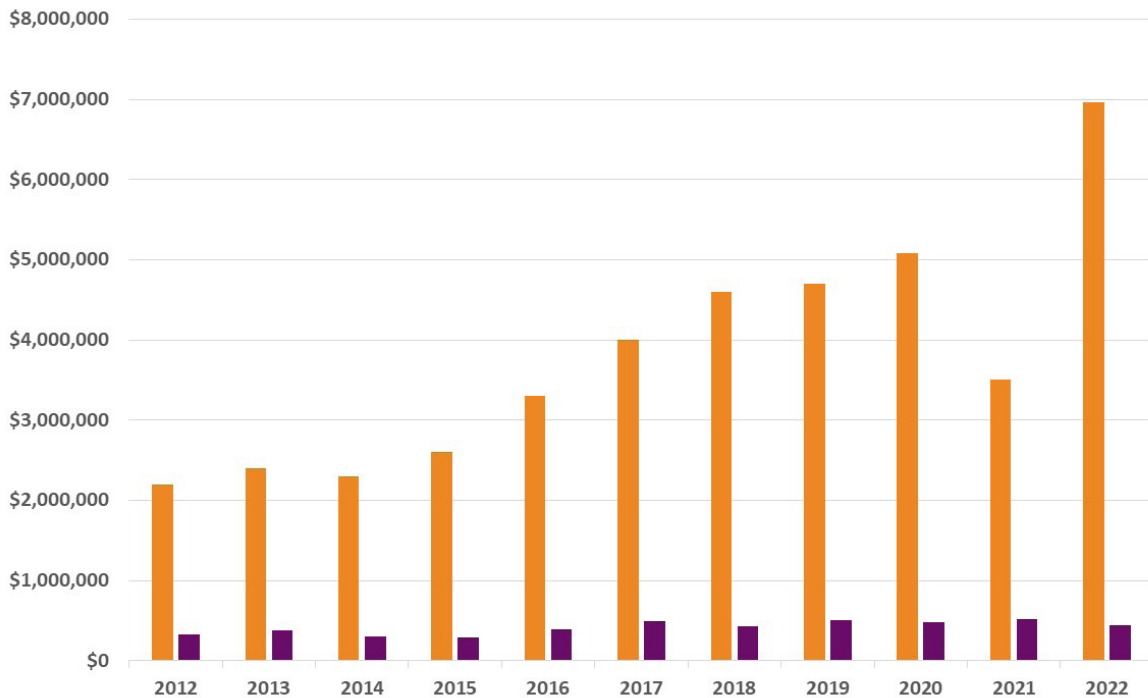
Travel-Related Employment Earnings
(Calendar Year)



2021 Employment Earnings: \$89 million
2019 (record year): \$88.7 million

*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.

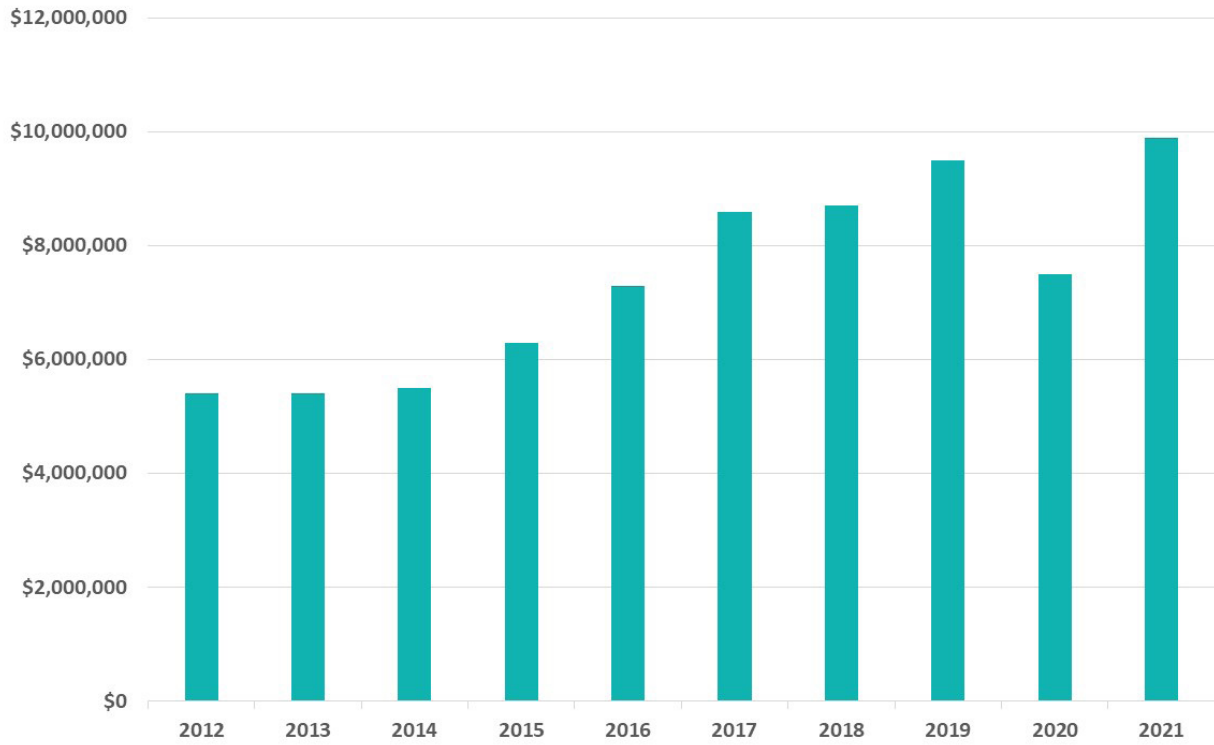
TOT County of Tuolumne and City of Sonora
(Fiscal Year)



2022 Total TOT: \$7.4 million
2019 (previous record year): \$5.2 million

■ Unincorporated Tuolumne County TOT
■ City of Sonora TOT

Total Travel-Related Tax Income
(Fiscal Year)



2021 Tourism Total Tax Revenue: \$9.9 million

2019 (previous record year): \$9.5 million

■ Total Local Sales Tax (includes TOT, visitor spending and attributable property taxes and sales taxes)



ABOUT VISIT TUOLUMNE COUNTY

Visit Tuolumne County (VTC) also known as Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau is a 501(c)6 non-profit corporation and a Destination Marketing and Management Organization (DMMO). Through the Agreement for the Promotion of Tourism with the County of Tuolumne and the City of Sonora, VTC is tasked with generating and increasing a sustainable source of revenue by promoting Tuolumne County's many assets that make it an exceptional tourist destination.

PURPOSE

While the traditional purpose of a DMMO is to market the destination, the role of a DMMO continues to evolve as the world evolves. Purposes now include initiatives like destination stewardship, destination development and advocacy on local, statewide, national, and even international levels. For Visit Tuolumne County, purposes include:

- A. Inspire visitors to choose Tuolumne County as their vacation destination.
- B. Promote to visitors locally (in-market), statewide, nationally, and internationally.
- C. Provide visitor services and resources such as a visitors center and travel guide.
- D. Be an effective community partner in destination development and management.
- E. Provide opportunities and initiatives to promote destination stewardship and sustainability to visitors and residents (including but not limited to historic preservation, clean up days and responsible travel messaging).
- F. Promote the benefits of the tourism industry to local residents, businesses and other stakeholders.
- G. Advocate for the tourism industry by being a liaison between the industry and governmental agencies.



VISIT TUOLUMNE COUNTY VALUE STATEMENTS

Mission Statement: To enhance economic growth by increasing tourism to Tuolumne County.

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

Strategic Statement: As an effort to align with Destination Marketing and Management Organization trends, VTC takes an active role in industry conferences, continued education, multi-year planning and strategic partnerships.

Vision Statement: VTC is the premiere authority for marketing Tuolumne County's tourism and is looked to for leadership in all areas of destination management.

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



2-YEAR GOALS OF VISIT TUOLUMNE COUNTY

GOAL 1

Tuolumne County will remain a top-of-mind destination for diverse domestic and international travelers.

Strategy:

- Maximize the brand through productive international/domestic partnerships.
- Identify and prioritize the most effective initiatives in all platforms of marketing.
- Expand professional relationships with media and travel trade representatives.

Outcome:

- Tuolumne County gains market share.
- Visitors are staying longer, spending more and traveling throughout the year.
- The Visit Tuolumne County brand is more recognizable domestically and internationally.

GOAL 2

Increase mid-week and off-peak visitation.

Strategy:

- Market Tuolumne County as a meetings and group destination during off-peak travel times.
- Build on effective meeting and group business initiatives, making those initiatives a priority.
- Track our influence on group business.
- Continue to provide group and meetings incentives.

Outcome:

- Increased annual groups and meetings business.
- Increased transient occupancy tax and sales tax income and travel spending during off-peak times.
- Statistics show increases in visitation spread out throughout the year.

GOAL 3

Visit Tuolumne County is recognized as a vital influencer in local and regional economic development.

Strategy:

- Build stronger relationships with stakeholders including partners, government and other community leaders and organizations.
- Attend Board of Supervisor and City Council meetings throughout the year to report on successes, not just the Annual Report.
- Work with County Economic Development to find ways to partner and communicate the importance of tourism to Tuolumne County residents and businesses.
- Grow and develop community events and attractions through the Visit Tuolumne County Community Investment Fund.
- Increased engagement with regional communities.
- Invest in research for marketing efforts to clearly illustrate the return on investment.

Outcome:

- Stakeholders and the community support VTC because they have a clear understanding of the vital role that tourism and the promotion of tourism plays in the economic well-being of Tuolumne County.
- Trust is gained from the community.
- Paths for continued economic growth are identified and supported.
- Local government is more informed with better data to support funding the VTC (funding the VTC is not even a question).

GOAL 4

Visit Tuolumne County is a leader in promoting destination stewardship and sustainability.

Strategy:

- VTC is a conduit for tourism sustainability.
- Include responsible travel messaging in marketing campaigns and public relations outreach.
- Host community stewardship events.
- Work with community partners (U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and local businesses).

Outcome:

- Preserving Tuolumne County as a destination for generations to come.
- Dedicated funds for stewardship and sustainability messaging.
- Community recognizes VTC as an asset for stewardship and sustainability.
- Educated visitors and residents who abide by leave no trace ethics.
- Continued growth and broader visitor base that includes those visitors seeking environmentally responsible destinations.
- Continue alliances with the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service, and develop new alliances with other relevant organizations, such as CalFire, etc.
- Residents benefit from a better quality of life due to sustainable tourism assets that they can enjoy every day.

GOAL 5

Visit Tuolumne County will have sustainable funding.

Strategy:

- Create a sole source document for the Board of Supervisors and the Sonora City Council that outlines the uniqueness and quality of work that VTC performs and the importance of continuing the successful 40-year partnership.
- Continue informing the community and elected officials about how tourism contributes to the general fund, tax income and economic growth and the necessity to promote our destination to continue that growth.
- Explore new ways to communicate return on investment.
- Find additional means of funding.

Outcome:

- VTC is recognized as the Sole Source for tourism promotion in Tuolumne County.
- The services that VTC provides are not outsourced to marketing agencies or others who do not have the experience, knowledge of or relationships that we have built over 40 years.
- VTC can move forward without the constant concern of being dissolved.
- VTC has secure, reliable funding and can plan out marketing initiatives further in advance.
- VTC can grow and expand marketing and sustainability initiatives.
- Economic growth through tourism.
- VTC can commit to hiring team members without having to worry about laying them off should there be a decrease in funding.
- Essential services continue to be funded and their funding grows through the increase in general fund dollars generated by the transient occupancy tax.

LONG TERM VISIONS OF VISIT TUOLUMNE COUNTY (5 Years)

- We are a recognized asset to the community and have developed a partnership with other economic development and community leaders to lay the groundwork for a new visitor information center (VIC) at the Highway 120/108 junction.
- We have influenced conference center development attracting new businesses and opportunities for tourism growth.
- We have influenced regional transportation development.

ACCOUNTABILITY**Financial:**

Visit Tuolumne County has an independent financial audit review annually conducted by a Certified Public Accountant.

Organizational and Operational:

Visit Tuolumne County achieved the acclaimed 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.

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.

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS:

- Brand USA (Visit the USA)
- U.S. Travel Association
- Visit California
- California Travel Association
- San Francisco Travel Association
- Destinations International
- Destination Marketing Association of the West (DMA-West)
- National Tour Association
- Meeting Planners International
- California Film Commission
- Gold Country Visitors Association
- High Sierra Visitors Council
- Yosemite Gateways

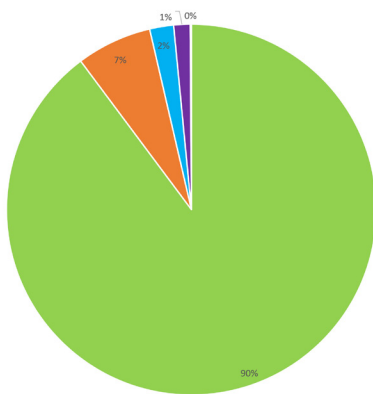
By being part of these associations, VTC benefits from receiving insights and allowed co-op advertising opportunities, but also has the ear of their leadership, significantly of Visit California, California Travel Association, DMA-West and the National Tour Association.

BUDGET SNAPSHOT

How Visit Tuolumne County is Funded:

Visit Tuolumne County is funded primarily by its allotment of Transient Occupancy Tax from the County of Tuolumne and the City of Sonora. Other forms of income are generated by membership dues, travel guide advertising sales and retail sales.

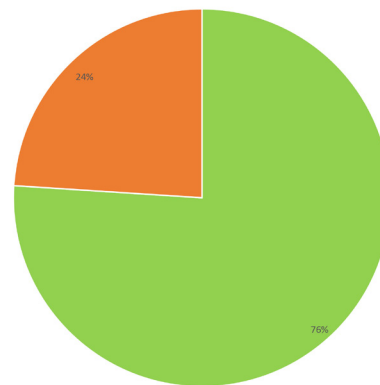
Income:



2021/2022 Income:

- County of Tuolumne TOT: \$1,500,000
- City of Sonora TOT: \$110,000
- Membership Dues: \$35,000
- Travel Guide Advertising Sales: \$24,000
- Retail: \$1,680

Expenses:



2021/2022 Expenses:

- Marketing: \$1,530,000
- Operations: \$483,000

MARKETING

Visit Tuolumne County’s marketing program is extensive and diverse. It includes traditional advertising, digital advertising, social media, public relations and meetings and travel trade promotion. The Visit Tuolumne County Marketing Plan includes these elements.

AUDIENCE OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

Local/In-Market:

With the “Wander Locally” campaign on local media outlets (Clarke Broadcasting and The Union Democrat) VTC promotes shopping and dining locally and stewardship to its nearest demographic --local residents.

Statewide:

The majority of visitors to Tuolumne County and VTC website traffic come from California. VTC implements strategic media placements and travel guide distribution in its top in-state markets, which are the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles area and Sacramento region. Television is a large segment of the media placed in this category.

National:

VTC began expanding marketing efforts into strategically chosen markets outside of California. Visitation studies and website traffic identify Seattle, Las Vegas and Phoenix as key target markets. Airlift and costs from and to these destinations also play a role in identifying key markets. VTC has implemented radio, social media and other media placements in these areas. Note that domestic travel is expected to show full recovery to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 but level off in 2023, and it is in VTC’s best interest to be competitive in the national marketplace as visitors continue to look for new destinations.



International:

International visitors are a significant source of income because they stay in a destination longer and spend more money than domestic travelers. Travel from outside of the U.S. continues to face challenges of excessive visa wait times, unfavorable exchange rate, etc. in 2022 and is not expected to achieve a full recovery until 2025. However, visitation from the United Kingdom and Canada is relatively strong and Visit California has identified them along with Mexico as key international markets. VTC partners with agencies in the U.K., Canada and Mexico to promote Tuolumne County for leisure market and travel trade, in their respective countries.

VTC continues its long-standing partnership with Brand USA and is now working with the U.S. Commercial Service to promote Tuolumne County in several other countries.



Meetings and Groups:

Meetings and groups business is very important as it fills significant need periods—midweek and off-peak season business. The VTC team is building momentum in this area by attending numerous conventions where staff meets face-to-face with meeting planners. We are also developing upon Visit California (Meet What's Possible) and San Francisco Travel Association's meetings initiatives to leverage and expand our meetings and groups program.

Travel Trade:

Travel trade refers to tour operators, travel agents and other professionals that organize and contract to buy travel products (hotel rooms, activities, etc.) to sell to groups and individuals. VTC team members continuously attend events where they showcase Tuolumne County to these professionals in-person. VTC is also a member of various associations, including the National Tour Association, of which VTC's Sales and Marketing Director is a Board Member.

LOCATION OPERATIONS

Visit Tuolumne County operates a year-round, full-time visitors center in downtown Sonora, which is staffed by a Visitors Services Expert and is the headquarters for the majority of full- and part-time staff. Additionally, VTC operates a part-time visitors services location in the Groveland Yosemite Gateway Museum which is staffed by two Visitors Services Experts during the summer months.



ANALYSIS

Visit Tuolumne County is tasked annually to inspire and influence travel to Tuolumne County. Year over year we continue to see growth in all sectors of the industry. Destination marketing is unique in that every year we start at zero. Meaning that we must attract new visitors annually. Destination marketing trends suggest that repeat visitors to a destination is minimal, as visitors are always looking for new and undiscovered destinations. Thus, it is vital that we continue to grow our visitor market share by expanding into new markets both domestically and internationally as well as developing new programs such as our groups and meetings initiative. Visit Tuolumne County is dedicated to growing tourism in Tuolumne County and this strategic plan is the footprint to the future and growth of the tourism industry.

As we forge into the future of marketing Tuolumne County, we will continue to align our brand, messaging, and tactics with our key strategic partners, Brand USA, Visit California, Gold Country Visitors Association, High Sierra Visitors Council and Yosemite Gateways. These partnerships are imperative to leveraging our marketing funds to compete with top destinations and ensure visitors choose Tuolumne County.

The power of tourism for our community is substantial and touches every Tuolumne County resident. Funds generated by tourism positively grow our economy and add to a brighter economic future. Taxes from tourism help support costs for essential services. Through tourism we can take part in managing our destination by implementing stewardship and sustainability initiatives, creating a destination that will be preserved for generations to come. The dedication of our team and our community mindedness are the underpinnings of everything we do and we look forward to continuing this important work that makes our community a better place.

*Thank You for your
continued support!*



Visit Tuolumne County • 193 S Washington St.
Sonora, California 95370 • (800) 446-1333 • VisitTuolumne.com

