

# ANNUAL REPORT



**VISIT ESTES PARK**

1692 Big Thompson Ave.  
Estes Park, CO 80517  
[VisitEstesPark.com](http://VisitEstesPark.com)



# VISIT ESTES PARK

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# INTRODUCTION

As we look back on the past year, Visit Estes Park is proud to share the 2022 edition of our annual report. This report summarizes our efforts for the past year and everything the organization has done to support Estes Park's tourism economy, enhance our guest experience and improve the quality of life for our workforce and residents.

This year, Estes Park emerged into a post-pandemic era with visitation returning to pre-pandemic levels and exceeding them. This shift came after two years of heightened interest in outdoor destinations which resulted in unprecedented visitation levels. As those numbers began to level off, we set our sights on stabilizing visitation by extending the season to boost a robust year-round economy through always-on, year-round marketing efforts.

We achieved this by placing a greater emphasis on diversifying visitor markets and seasonality while continuing to support our busy season. This included the expansion of Estes Park's signature winter events into month-long celebrations and festivals. The year started with positioning the destination as the ultimate place to snowshoe in Colorado and concluded with Visit Estes Park advocating for Frozen Dead Guy Days, an iconic Colorado winter music festival, to come to Estes Park.

To encourage those visitors to get out into the community and into local businesses, we teamed up with the Estes Chamber of Commerce and Town of Estes Park to launch the "Beyond" initiative, showcasing themed offers available throughout the community during special events. We're excited to continue and grow this initiative in 2023.

In this past year, we also responded to the needs of our community with an enhanced focus on creative messaging that aligns with the values of our community, attracts visitors who will care for our destination, and educates them on responsible ways to enjoy our beautiful environment. This included our Do Estes Right campaign with local filmmaker Nick Molle. Messaging centered around the importance of planning ahead and how to minimize visitor impact while being good stewards of the environment. Elements included digital advertising, social media posts and blogs, as well as stakeholder education and toolkit materials, all with a sustainability focus.

We also confirmed that the value of tourism in Estes Park continues to grow, with new data from Dean Runyan Associates showing that tourism-related spending in Estes Park has generated 3,100 jobs and contributes \$3,270 per resident household in local tax receipts. This further strengthened our commitment to attracting responsible visitation, as well as improving local quality of life and conserving area natural resources.

Striking the right balance between enhancing visitor experience, promoting economic vitality, and preserving resident quality of life is critical to Estes Park's future. We value your support and encourage your engagement.



Kara Franker  
CEO, Visit Estes Park





# VISITATION

## Destination Stewardship

In 2022, destination stewardship continued to be an integral part of our destination marketing approach. Our work focused on the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainability to positively impact our community and encourage a guest experience where mindfulness and respect are top priorities.

Our strategies included diversifying visitor markets and seasonality while continuing to support our busy season. We also launched a new responsible travel education campaign and established an internal inclusivity and sustainability task force. We implemented initiatives like these to contribute to conserving our natural resources and small-town charm, while aligning with the town's guiding principles. And we worked towards achieving these goals through community collaboration, strategic planning and always-on, year-round efforts.

## Lodging and Short-Term Rentals

Smith Travel reported that there are 2,681 hotel rooms in Estes Park as of 2021. This includes other lodging like lodges and inns. Additionally, the Estes Park Local Marketing District contains approximately 842 short-term rental units (STRs). This number incorporates the 515 STRs in the Town of Estes Park, as reported by EVSTRA, and units in unincorporated Larimer County that fall within the marketing district limits.

## Rocky Mountain National Park

Rocky Mountain National Park was the fourth most visited national park in 2022 with an incredible **4.3 million visitors**.

2022 RMNP Visitation by Month





# DATA

## Dean Runyan Associates Tourism Impact Study

A new report by Dean Runyan Associates showed that Estes Park's tourism industry is a significant driver of sustainable economic growth in the Estes Valley. The report analyzed 2021 sales tax and visitor data and confirmed that visitors contributed 77.5% of the total collected sales tax within the Town of Estes Park and \$3,270 per resident household in local taxes within the Local Marketing District. This means that without visitors, each resident household would need to contribute an additional \$3,270 in taxes in order to maintain our economy and current public safety service levels, including the Estes Valley Fire Protection District and the Estes Park Police Department.

Furthermore, the report confirmed that tourism created 3,100 jobs and generated \$100.6MM in employee wages. This data demonstrates how crucial tourism is for the destination and how it provides the opportunity for fulfilling jobs, funding exemplary town amenities and tax savings in this incredible place we call home.

In 2021, tourism alone generated:



**\$100.6 million**  
in employee wages



**\$35 million**  
in tax receipts



Tourism contributed  
**\$3,270**  
per resident household  
in local taxes



Total visitor  
volume totaled nearly  
**1.8 million**  
person-trips



Travel-generated  
employment  
grew to  
**3,100 jobs**

## KeyData Short Term Rental Data

To help gain insights into the local vacation rental industry, we partnered with KeyData to obtain reporting on occupancy, average daily rate (ADR) and revenue per available room (RevPAR) for short term rental units in Estes Park. KeyData works with several local property management companies that use this service as their benchmarking tool. Their participation allows us to analyze real-time data on many of our STR properties and see bookings by date booked to understand historical data.

## Looking Ahead

In 2023, we will continue to develop our data collection with a new visitor intercept study. Throughout the year, surveyors will approach approximately 1,500 guests in the downtown area and near Town signature events to request participation. The data gathered will allow us to understand our target markets better and garner a more accurate estimation of visitors' economic impact on our community.

We're also exploring ways to dive deeper into Colorado state-wide and jurisdictional data with a new data partnership set to kick off in 2023. This partnership will also include a new dashboard that will incorporate several VEP data sources, including our lodging tax data, KeyData (STVRs) and marketing data.





# LODGING TAX EXTENSION

In March 2022, a new law was signed by Colorado Governor Jared Polis. This law expanded the use of local lodging tax revenue to address gaps in the need for workforce housing and childcare. Communities across the state that rely on tourism to survive were suddenly on their own to figure out what's more important: attracting the tourism needed to support their town's financial well-being, or funding much-needed workforce housing and childcare.

Unfortunately, some towns saw their tourism marketing budgets completely decimated in the name of workforce housing. Reduced tourism in those towns meant businesses would likely close, and life safety services would lose critical funding. Visit Estes Park couldn't let this happen to our community. Too many residents depend on tourism-related jobs to survive. The organization knew Colorado's market share plunged 30% within two years after the state eliminated its tourism marketing budget in 1993. This resulted in a revenue loss of well over \$2 billion annually until market share was regained in 2015. (Source: Longwoods International)

So, Visit Estes Park worked quickly to develop a solution that could be a win for the economy and the workforce. And together with the community, we did what no other organization in Colorado was able to accomplish. In November 2022, we passed a lodging tax extension ballot initiative that would bring in dedicated funding for workforce housing and childcare while also preserving the budget essential for tourism marketing. This ensured a long-term, sustainable community ecosystem for local workers to live in and prosper.

To get the word out to the community, we created:

- A community task force with 37 total members
- 9 community engagement events
- An advocacy group comprised of 5 major Estes organizations to rally for the cause, including the Estes Chamber of Commerce, Estes Park EDC, EPNPRC, EVSTRA and EVICS
- A political marketing campaign, produced in-house, which included:
  - A dedicated campaign website
  - 9 workforce interview campaign videos
  - 59 articles published in the Estes Park Trail Gazette, including 14 community leader editorial news articles
  - An educational advertising campaign through social media and digital display
  - Stakeholder materials and communications, including a campaign asset library

On election day, the Lodging Tax Extension ballot initiative passed by an impressive 62%

What did we achieve?

- The lodging tax was raised from 2% to 5.5%, with the increase dedicated to funding workforce housing and childcare initiatives in Estes Park, while preserving the funding necessary to keep tourism alive and healthy in the Estes Valley.
- This lodging tax extension fund is projected to contribute \$26 million to our community in the first five years and has already started collecting funds as of January 2023.

[Click here to view the Lodging Tax Extension video.](#)



# PAID MEDIA

Sophisticated targeting was implemented to reach the right audience, at the right time, with the right message through digital display, paid search, paid social media and podcast advertising. This integrated online and offline media strategy used comprehensive tracking, combined with travel data to inform targeting and media placements to prospects in key markets.

Paid media efforts delivered a high number of impressions, which far exceeded our goal of 25 million, resulting in increased brand awareness and consistently strong website traffic.

## January - December Campaign Results

Circulation	Impressions	Clicks	CTR
910,554	110,944,753	1,384,455	1.25%

Open	Open Rate	Video Completion
151,627	58.14%	1,928,289

## Media Accomplishments

### 2022 Media Accomplishments

- Increased focus on Drive market
  - Increased in-state visitation by 56%
- Lodging Tax Extension paid media and paid social campaign
  - Educated the public and supported the bill's passing
- New sustainability campaign called "Do Estes Right"
  - The campaign went live on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube promoting responsible visitation
- Milestone traveler campaigns
  - New strategy to fill need periods with visitors celebrating special milestone-related moments like an anniversary
- Launched TikTok advertising campaign
  - Quickly became the second-highest social website referral driver





# CONTENT

## VisitEstesPark.com

In 2022, we engaged web users with content that balanced practical destination information and resources with aspirational content. We analyzed research data to implement technical and content recommendations from our search engine optimization team and followed best practices like keyword research for new content pages. We strived for 2 million web sessions and exceeded that goal.

**2,154,146**  
Sessions

**1,628,433**  
Users

**2 min 14 sec**  
Average Session Duration  
Industry average: 1 min 40 sec

Top viewed blogs:

- 5 Best Trails to Hike with Your Dog
- A Visitor's Guide to Downtown Estes Park
- 10 Unique Places to Stay in Estes Park
- 5 Perfect Winter Weekend Itineraries
- 9 Best Winter Hikes

## Lodging Referral Engine

**375,312** Searches within Visit Estes Park's engine

**407,222** Referrals sent to stakeholder booking engines

**\$4,324,370** Estimated booking revenue referred, based on a global conversion rate, referrals sent, average daily rate and the average length of stay

## Enewsletters

In 2022, as the consumer e-newsletter subscriber database grew, we leveraged our content to educate those who had already decided to travel and inspired those yet to book. Content pillars were established to make sure we covered all of our target interests in each e-mail.

Averaged Subscribed in 2022: 70,573

29% open rate      Industry average open rate: 21.33%

3.4% click rate      Industry average click rate: 2.25%

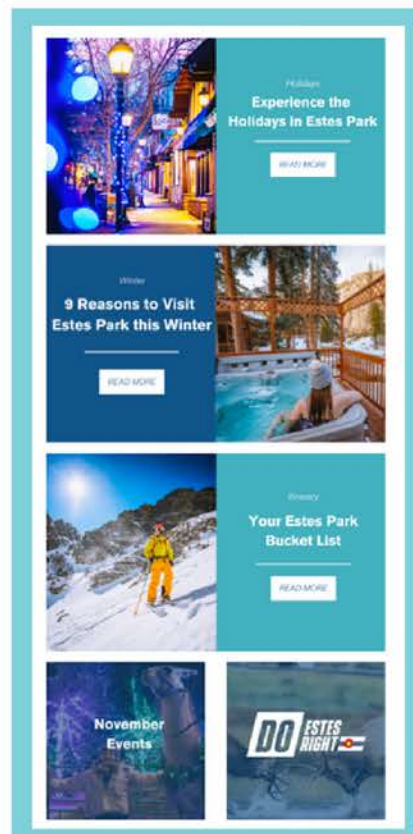
## Social Media

We continued to build a highly engaged community of followers by posting inspirational and educational content across Visit Estes Park social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and our newest platform TikTok.

**+ 6,888 new followers on Instagram**

**+ 7,120 new followers on Facebook**

**+ 3,500 new followers on TikTok**





# PUBLIC RELATIONS

**97 articles generated   1,414,058,156 impressions   \$3,249,649 Ad Value Equivalency**

Public relations efforts generated significant coverage in top media outlets like the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Conde Nast Traveler and Forbes. Media hits in major national media outlets helped us to surpass our goal of 25 million media impressions.

As we marketed our destination to writers and other media, we focused on topics such as extending the season, responsible visitation, and diversity and tourism advocacy. We made sure their Estes Park experience and education reflected these initiatives.

Key Coverage: Wall Street Journal - Frozen Dead Guy Days received national attention for its move to Estes Park and the captivating story of the two towns made it on the cover.

New York Times - Estes Park was featured in their "52 Places For a Changed World" article. For the 2022 list, they focused on destinations that emphasized sustainable tourism.

## Media Visits

We hosted media visits throughout the year to provide journalists with the firsthand experience needed to write quality, in-depth articles on Estes Park. These visits resulted in domestic and international media coverage for the destination, covering year-round offerings. Highlights include:

- Erin Gifford, a freelancer writing for The New York Times and The Washington Post.
- Simon Berninger, a German radio and podcast host, visited in November to cover winter travel in Colorado.

## The New York Times

This New York Times article resulted from hosting Cindy Hirschfeld, a Colorado-based editor and freelancer for national outlets.

## Coming Soon to an American Cliff Near You: 'Via Ferrata' Routes

Long popular in Europe, the beginner-friendly climbing routes are being installed on peaks and in gorges across the United States. Here are six to try now.

This article resulted from hosting Carri Willbanks to spend the holidays in Estes Park. It features Mountain Village at Lake Estes along with other partners such as Dick's Rock Museum and the Dunraven.

## CHRISTMAS CABIN GETAWAY IN ESTES PARK, COLORADO

By Carri Willbanks /

I always thought the goal was to be home for Christmas. Turn on any radio station this time of year and you'll hear Bing Crosby (or Michael Bublé) crooning "I'll be home for Christmas." It's also the name of not one, but two holiday movies.

That said, my family recently discovered a place we'd love to wake up in [Colorado on Christmas](#) morning. It's not our beloved house in Denver. It's a cabin in Estes Park.

Technically, we were staying at Mountain Village in Cabin #26. But with its two decorated trees and festive decor worthy of a holiday home featured on HGTV, it may as well be called The Ultimate Christmas Cabin in [Estes Park](#).



## GO WORLD TRAVEL MAGAZINE





# SUSTAINABILITY

We promoted sustainability as a core value of Estes Park through our Do Estes Right campaign with local filmmaker Nick Molle. Messaging centered around the importance of planning ahead and minimizing visitor impact while being good stewards of the environment. Local filmmaker Nick Molle produced this video series, and the campaign name urges visitors to "Do Estes Right." The videos were distributed to visitors in advance of their visit through marketing campaigns and VisitEstesPark.com and also reached them again when they arrived in market through the Rocky Mountain Channel.

Topics included:

- Know Before You Go
- Keep Wildlife Wild
- Be Careful with Fire
- Leave No Trace
- Estes Park Parking & Shuttles
- RMNP Timed-Entry Permit System

The campaign has received:

- 1.8 million impressions
- Reach of 950K
- 140K views on YouTube



# ALL ARE WELCOME

- We diversified our audiences to reach travelers of all ages and are producing content to appeal to those audiences, like our multigenerational photoshoot.
- The Inclusivity & Sustainability Task Force accomplished the following:
  - Completed Destination International's EDI Leadership six-month series diving deep into unconscious bias, allyship and more.
  - Participated in Destination International's EDI Assessment Tool.
  - Incorporated messages of accessibility throughout our content.
  - Highlighted businesses that are practicing inclusivity.
- In 2023:
  - We are adding an accessibility tool to our website so that users with different abilities can better browse our content.
  - We are in the process of building an inclusivity & sustainability landing page that will include resources as well as a detailed commitment to making Estes Park welcoming for all.
  - We are supporting an art auction at the upcoming Isabella Bird event to fund accessible equipment for exploring Rocky Mountain National Park.

## KEP EXPEDITIONS GETS VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES OUTSIDE

By Lisa Berry on May 25, 2023  
The year-long grant-making company KEP Expeditions, began funding veterans' expeditions, an organization that specializes in taking veterans with disabilities back to nature, to hiking and camping. Recently, it named KEP member Brian Knapik as one of its veterans to help them about the program, and what KEP offers.

What does Brian Knapik mean? and how did KEP Expeditions become involved?  
Brian Knapik means "for the rescue", and is a social entrepreneur that aids American-made apparel with proceeds going to the Ocular War Veterans which is a leader in changing lives through adaptive recreation. The founder of Ocular War Veterans is his cousin, Aaron. From across the globe he is a gifted guide, and has been in the field about 10 years to get some sort of Ocular War Veterans team in Colorado. Once KEP Expeditions was up and running, we agreed that a more inclusive kind of Rocky Mountain National Park was a great option for visitors. That's how Brian Knapik, Ocular War Veterans (OWV) and Brian Knapik. Our Mission is to come up with some sort of plan for a custom Ocular War Veterans to





# COMMUNITY RELATIONS

## Extend the Season

Our "Extend the Season" campaign encouraged travel to Estes Park beyond summer and fall. The campaign positioned Estes Park as a winter wonderland filled with snowy sights, twinkling lights and winter activities for all, including a special spotlight on the holiday season.

- We enhanced the Tree Lighting Ceremony by adding 30,000 holiday lights to the main tree, as well as colorful lights to the smaller trees around George Hix Plaza. To make the experience even more festive, we arranged for carriage rides, llamas, and carolers to entertain and delight attendees.
- We partnered with Cousin Pat's to bring the popular "Miracle Pop-Up Bar" to our community. The venue was a hit with locals and visitors alike and added to the festive atmosphere of the holiday season.
- We hired carolers to perform before the Catch the Glow Parade, adding to the holiday spirit and community engagement around this wonderful event.
- We recruited 15 businesses and 3 residences to be a part of the "Estes Park Holiday Trail," where everyone decks their houses and storefronts with holiday cheer.



## Partnerships

Throughout 2022, we partnered, sponsored and collaborated with many local organizations and events. Our event sponsorship program strongly supported programs that benefitted and enhanced the community while simultaneously encouraging visitation to the Estes Valley. We plan to expand this initiative in 2023 to include projects outside of physical events. Visit Estes Park leaders worked closely with the Estes Chamber of Commerce, Estes Park EDC and the Town of Estes Park to address shared goals for the benefit of the community.

2022 Event Sponsorship recipients include: Autumn Gold, Cinco De Mayo, Dia De los Muertos, Duck Race, EPNRC Apres Ski, Estes Park Cycling Coalition, Estes Park Mountain Bike Club, EVFPD, 9/11 Stair Climb, FILManthrophy, Friends of Folk, Kahuna Memorial, Rooftop Rodeo, EVICS Kermes Cultural, Longs Peak Scottish Irish Festival, National Philanthropy Day and Snowy Grass Festival.



TOWN OF  
ESTES PARK  
COLORADO



**Destination Travel Network Partnership**

Generated over **\$450k** in website sales

**Vacationland Partnership**

**106,000** books printed

Available in: **165 Estes Park locations**



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In 2022, the Visit Estes Park team prioritized community engagement and outreach by launching initiatives to improve communication and connection with stakeholders. The team initiated the following programs:

## Community Roundtables

We launched the Community Roundtables to connect with the local community and provide important updates. The Roundtables were well received by the community, with the first meeting focusing on VEP's marketing efforts and the second meeting covering updates from the Colorado Tourism Office, Clarity of Place, and Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP).

## Ambassador Program

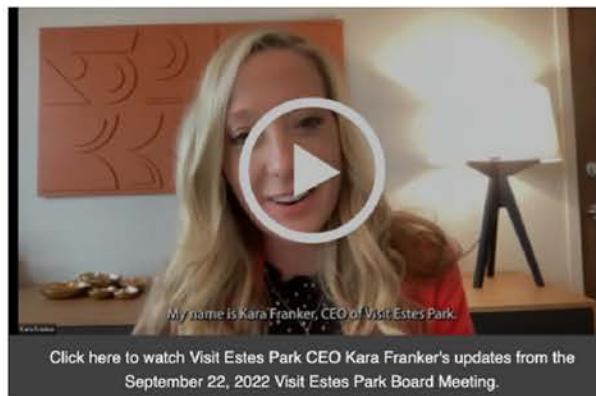
We launched the Ambassador Program as a tool for community outreach, where the team provided personalized communication to stakeholders to keep them informed of VEP programs/offers and upcoming events. The team made weekly calls and visits to build relationships and ensure stakeholders were up-to-date on all VEP happenings.

## Happenings Report

We brought back the Happenings Report in 2022 and made it available in the local paper and visitor center, as well as to all stakeholders. The report lists all the events happening in town each week and has received positive feedback from local lodgers who provide the report to their guests.

## The Rundown: Video Digest

We added a short video of our CEO, Kara, after each board meeting, providing an overview of the meeting to stakeholders, and also included upcoming events and large groups with anticipated numbers to the Stakeholder Newsletters. The newsletter has been well received and has proven to be an effective communication tool.





# COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

## Beyond

### Event Program

Estes Park's festivals and events draw tens of thousands of people into town. We launched The Beyond Event program in collaboration with the Estes Chamber and the Town of Estes Park to help drive event attendees into our local businesses while in town. To do this, we invited local businesses to submit special offers specific to event campaigns. These offers were featured on a dedicated page on VisitEstesPark.com, which was shared with guests through event posters, blogs, social media channels and in dedicated pitches to the media for news coverage.

#### Beyond Elk Fest

20

Special Offers

2,815

Website Click-Throughs

#### Top Performing Specials:

Explore Estes: 450

The Barrel: 266

Green Jeep Tours: 265

#### Beyond Holidays

109

Special Offers

2,124

Website Click-Throughs

#### Top Performing Specials:

Backbone Adventures' Winter Jeep Special: 326

Dunraven's Christmas Buffet: 289

Cousin Pat's Miracle on 7: 285



We created a celebration, and a manifesto, called "Estes Inspired" dedicated to all the people who make Estes Park such a special destination. Through this celebration, we emphasized the value of tourism, hosted a responsible tourism panel with industry experts from Clarity of Place and Turner PR and generated excitement for who we are and what we want to be as a destination moving forward.

At the event, we released an inspirational video featuring local partners sharing why they are "Estes Inspired." This video brought out stories of how we can preserve and protect this beautiful place for years to come and drove home core values held throughout Estes Park. Additionally, we partnered with the Estes Chamber of Commerce to put on a trade show connecting Estes Park business owners with suppliers and arranged a panel on the Business of Tourism.

[Click here to view the Estes Inspired video.](#)

## New Visitor Center Kiosk

We received a grant to build and design a new kiosk at the Visitor Center in Estes Park. We worked with TrueOmni to build this kiosk, which provides information to visitors while in market, a translation feature, real-time analytics, social media interaction, a photo booth, RMNP ticketing feature and an itinerary builder.





# SALES

## International Visitation

In June 2022, COVID testing requirements were dropped in the United States, fully opening the country to international visitors. Visit Estes Park recognized the opportunity to re-engage this market as international travelers are year-round, mid-week visitors, filling spending gaps for hotels and restaurants. To achieve this, we ramped up international media relations, actively participated in the statewide International Promotions Committee and attended conferences such as IPW. We are closely following the visa wait time issue and supporting advocacy through our partnership with U.S. Travel Association.

Top International Markets: Mexico, Canada, U.K, Australia, France

Top Searched Colorado Destinations on Google: Denver, Colorado Springs, Aspen, Vail, Estes Park

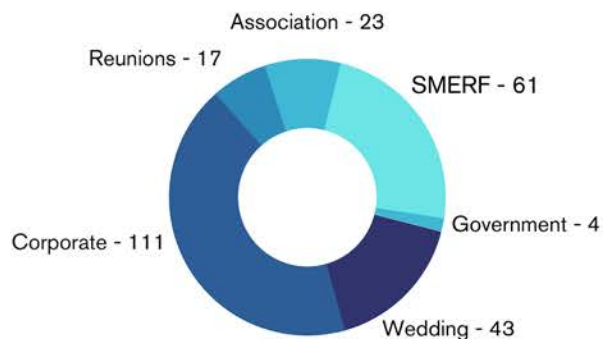
*Source: Colorado Tourism Office*

## IPW

To reignite international visitation, Visit Estes Park participated in the U.S. Travel Association's IPW conference. This was an ideal in-person platform to renew travel industry relationships and connect with travel buyers and media from around the world to restart domestic and global travel.

## Group Sales

- Total for 2022: 259 leads, totaling 61,369 requested room nights with an estimated economic value of \$9,933,670.
- Attended local trade shows throughout the year - Rocky Mountain Bridal, Estes Park Wedding Association, MIC, Destination West, IPW and Meetings Showcase.
- Conducted a family reunions and weddings photo shoot.



*SMERF stands for social, military, educational, religious and fraternal groups*





# FINANCE

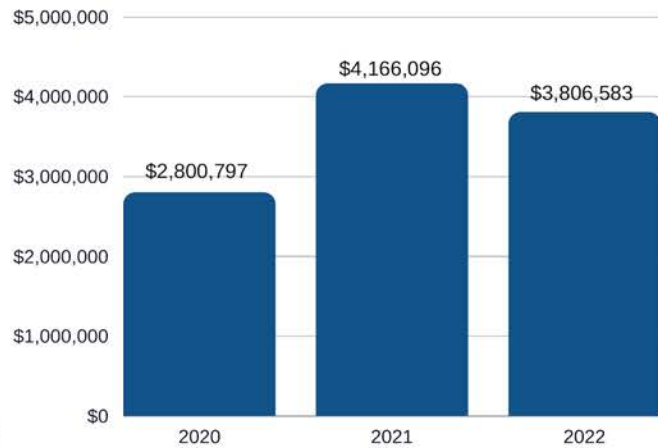
## ORGANIZATIONAL FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

### FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

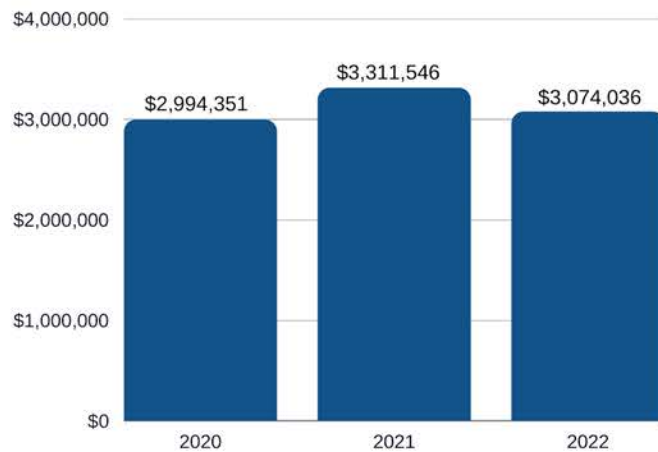
#### REVENUES\*

(8.6)% — % change 2022 over 2021  
35.9% — % change 2022 over 2020

\*Includes ALL revenues received, not just lodging taxes  
\* 2021 figures included PPP loan forgiveness of \$209,390

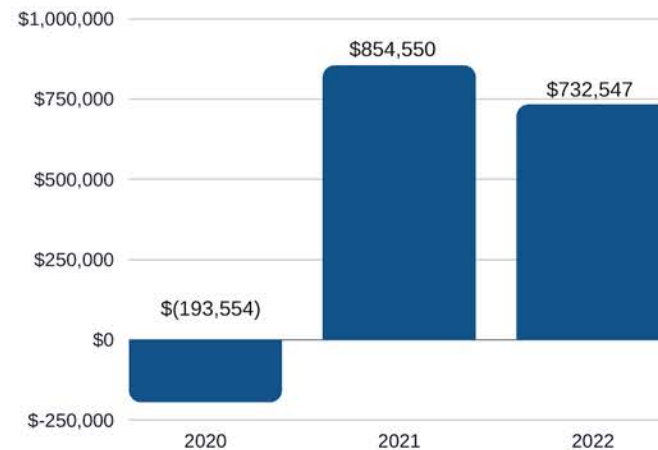


#### EXPENSES



#### NET INCOME\*

\* Figures exclude Net Pension Expense  
and other adjustments from auditors





# FINANCE

## \$3,402,051

### LODGING TAX REVENUES

DOWN \$85K, OR 2.4% FROM 2021.  
UP \$1.2M, OR 53.2% FROM 2020.  
NUMBERS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS  
ADDITIONAL LODGING PROPERTIES REMIT  
OUTSTANDING TAXES.

## \$5,530,483

### SALES TAXES

RECEIVED BY THE TOWN FROM LODGING  
ESTABLISHMENTS WITHIN THE TOWN  
OF ESTES PARK.

## FINANCIAL & INTERNAL AUDITS

Visit Estes Park completed its annual financial audit in July 2022, and received a clean independent auditor's report from Haynie & Company.

## ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

### DESTINATION MARKETING ACCREDITATION PROGRAM



The globally recognized Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) serves as a visible industry distinction that defines quality and performance standards in destination marketing and management. To become accredited, destination marketing organizations must demonstrate compliance with more than 100 performance standards. Accreditation standards are set by an independent panel of industry veterans representing a diverse selection of destination marketing organizations. Standards are regularly revisited and revised to reflect the evolution of best practices in our industry.

Visit Estes Park first achieved accreditation in 2014. Every four years, our organization is required to undergo DMAP's reaccreditation process, demonstrating that we remain in compliance with current performance standards and that we meet all newly implemented standards as well.

During 2022, the entire Visit Estes Park team was involved in the creation of new policies and procedures, updating existing policies, documenting existing procedures, and reviewing, critiquing, and editing other staff members documents on a cross-department basis. By having team members review other departments work, they were able to broaden their understanding of the organization as a whole. The six-month process culminated in the submission of our application for reaccreditation with distinction in December 2022. We now await a response from the DMAP board as to our reaccreditation status.