

THE HEIGHT OF HAPPINESS



HIGHLANDS

NORTH CAROLINA

The Road We |
Built Together |

ANNUAL REPORT
END OF FISCAL YEAR
2024/2025

I Who We Are

The Highlands Chamber of Commerce and Visit Highlands, NC are dedicated to enhancing the economic vitality, livability, and community spirit of Highlands. Together, we serve as the voice of local businesses, support residents, and welcome visitors with authentic experiences.

INCOME SOURCES

MEMBERSHIP INCOME

Business & Social Membership Dues: **\$32,345**
Advertising Partners: **\$119,413**

OCCUPANCY TAX

Total Occupancy Tax (FY 2024/25): \$1.384M

How the Occupancy Tax Works

Occupancy Tax is generated through visitor spending on short term lodging accommodations, including hotels, inns, bed and breakfasts, and vacation rentals. When guests pay for overnight stays, a 3% tax is collected on the lodging cost. These funds are reinvested into tourism promotion and related initiatives that encourage continued visitation, creating a positive economic impact for Highlands.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The Highlands Area Tourism Development Commission oversees the work done by Visit Highlands, NC to attract visitors by showcasing the town's natural beauty, cultural richness, and distinctive character. Efforts focus on

strengthening the local economy through tourism while ensuring that the area's unique identity and traditions remain central to the visitor experience. By relying on research-driven strategies, maintaining a consistent and authentic brand, and prioritizing the preservation of Highlands' cultural heritage, Visit Highlands, NC aims to position the community as a welcoming destination for travelers.

Brian Stiehler, Chair
Town of Highlands Commissioner

John Shearl
Macon County District 1 Commissioner

Bill Futral - Futral Construction,
Small Accommodations

Thomas Keenan - Old Edwards Hospitality,
Large Accommodations

Bill Bubenik - Elevation of Highlands, Retail

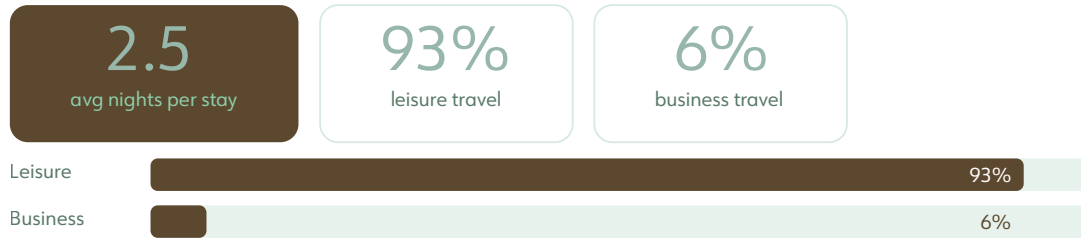
Kaye Craig - Ugly Dog Pub/The High Dive,
Restaurant

Charlotte Muir - The Highlands Performing Arts
Center, Non-Profit

NC Mountain Region Overnight Visitors

Visitors to the Mountain Region are more likely to use destination websites, general search engines and their own experience to plan travel to NC than visitors to other regions.

TRIP PURPOSE & LENGTH



WHEN VISITORS COME



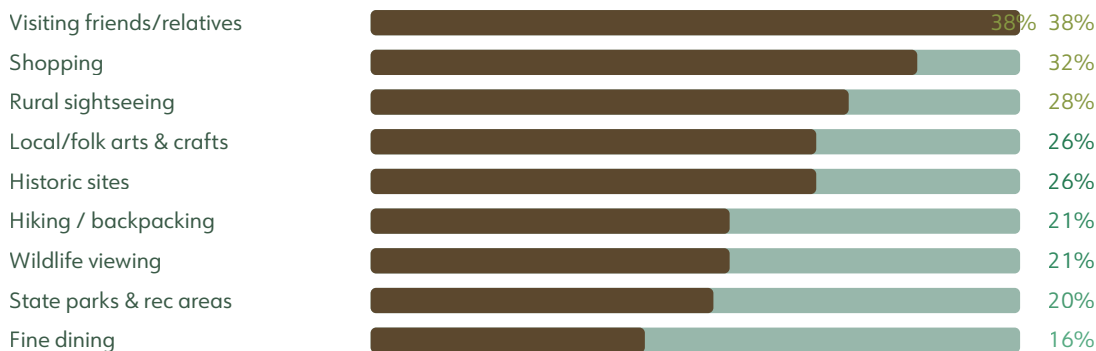
TRAVELER PROFILE



VISITOR SPENDING PER TRIP



TOP ACTIVITIES



TOP STATES OF ORIGIN



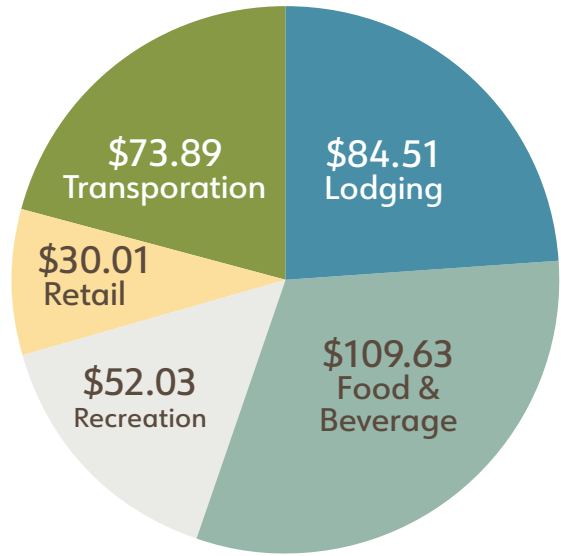
TRIP PLANNING BEHAVIOR

Mountain Region visitors are more likely than those in other NC regions to use destination websites, general search engines, and their own prior experience when planning their trip.

NC Mountain Region
2024 Overnight Visitor Data

Visitor Spending in Macon County (2024 - in millions)

TOTAL: **\$347.44 million**
This is -0.8% less than 2023



Visitor spending in Macon County provided:

\$11.31 million

state tax revenues generated by tourists

1,731

jobs directly supported by tourism

\$17.93 million

local county tax revenues
generated by tourists

\$82.52 million

worker paychecks annually

\$1,567,558.15

in sales tax to the Town of Highlands

\$759.55

tax savings per resident as a result of
tourist spending

How We Invest Back

How the income is spent to the benefit of
Highlands area residents, businesses and visitors.

Visit Highlands, NC Budget Overview FY 2024-2025 Report

Total

Income	
4000 Occupancy Tax	1,462,500.00
Total for Income	\$1,462,500.00
Cost of Goods Sold	
Gross Profit	\$1,462,500.00
Expenses	
504PR PUBIC RELATIONS/COMMUNICATION	
03PR Tourism Market	\$300,000.00
5402PR Initiatives & Campaigns	95,000.00
01PR Personnel	\$52,222.30
05PR Travel & Entertainment	\$2,500.00
5027PR Training & Development	2,000.00
04PR Sourced Labor	\$850.00
Total for 504PR PUBIC RELATIONS/COMMUNICATION	\$452,572.30
506E EVENTS	
09E Production	\$190,000.00
02E Sourced Labor	\$100,000.00
05E Personnel	\$52,222.30
01E Hosting	\$3,750.00
08E Travel & Entertainment	\$3,500.00
03E Training & Development	\$2,000.00
07E Insurance	\$1,500.00
06E Fulfillment	\$0.00
Total for 506E EVENTS	\$352,972.30
501TM TRADITIONAL MEDIA	
03TM Collateral	\$105,000.00
01TM Personnel	\$52,222.30
02TM Sourced Labor	\$50,000.00
06TM Advertising	\$5,000.00
05TM Travel & Entertainment	\$2,500.00
04TM Training & Development	\$2,000.00
07TM Fulfillment	\$150.00
Total for 501TM TRADITIONAL MEDIA	\$216,872.30

Visit Highlands, NC Budget Overview FY 2024-2025 Report

	Total
502TP TECH PLATFORM	
02TP Personnel	\$52,222.30
03TP Website	\$50,000.00
01TP Tech Platform - Adv Online	\$30,000.00
04TP Sourced Labor	\$20,000.00
07TP Info Technology	\$5,500.00
05TP Travel & Entertainment	\$2,500.00
06TP Data Processing & Dev	\$2,500.00
5027TP Training & Development	2,000.00
Total for 502TP TECH PLATFORM	\$164,722.30
503B BRANDING	
02B Branding - Personnel	\$52,222.30
5402B Initiatives and Campaigns	10,000.00
5200B Merchandise Giveaway	6,000.00
01B Branding - Research & Design	\$2,500.00
06B Travel & Entertainment	\$2,500.00
5027B Staff Training & Development	2,000.00
03B Branding - Sourced Labor	\$1,500.00
04B Branding - Fulfillment	\$400.00
Total for 503B BRANDING	\$77,122.30
505FA FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION	
11FA Personnel	\$19,868.54
04FA Dues & Subscriptions	\$18,000.00
09FA Housing	\$15,000.00
02FA Accounting & Legal	\$6,000.00
14FA Insurance	\$5,000.00
16FA Travel & Entertainment	\$2,500.00
07FA Office Supplies	\$2,250.00
5027FA Training & Development	2,000.00
15FA Postage	\$1,500.00
12FA Sourced Labor	\$850.00
13FA Depreciation	\$500.00
05FA Bank Fees	\$300.00

Visit Highlands, NC Budget Overview FY 2024-2025 Report

03VS Fulfillment	\$10,000.00
09VS Travel & Entertainment	\$2,500.00
5242VS Supplies	2,500.00
5027VS Staff Training & Development	2,000.00
02VS Sourced Labor	\$850.00
Total for 507VS VISITOR SERVICES	\$70,072.30
1176 Prepaid Tourism Sponsorship	0.00
Total for Expenses	\$1,408,122.34
Net Operating Income	\$54,377.66
Other Income	
Other Expenses	
Net Other Income	
Net Income	\$54,377.66



| How We Invest Back

\$204,683.08

 spent on Initiatives and Campaigns

EVENTS FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

High Style

22 Friday Night Live Concerts

20 Saturday on Pine Concerts

Volunteer Fair

July 4th Concert and Fireworks

Heritage Jamboree

Shred Event

Halloween on Main

Light Up the Park & Main

Christmas Parade

Santa in the Park

SUPPORT FOR THE TOWN OF HIGHLANDS

Fireworks

Lights on Main St and Park for holidays

New Holiday Decor:
Lighted Wreaths for Main St

Downtown Hanging Flower Baskets

Pressure washing of downtown
trash receptacles

Landscaping Town Property at 108 Main St



Supporting Our Community |

GRANTS AND SPONSORSHIPS to Highlands
Non-Profit Organizations:

\$159,705.41

The Bascom

Episcopal Church

Highlands Motoring Festival

Highlands Performing Arts Center

Highlands Rotary Club

Mountaintop Rotary Club

\$198,105.82

in Labor Support for nearly 200 individuals
across the local and regional community.

\$1,500

in Student Scholarships and Career Day
assistance support for Highlands School.



LEADERSHIP HIGHLANDS

14 new community leaders trained to serve the community.

\$26,000

to Leadership Highlands program

What is Leadership Highlands?

Leadership Highlands is an educational program run by the Chamber, aimed at emerging and existing leaders in the Highlands community. It offers an opportunity to enhance civic knowledge, leadership skills and network. Those selected commit to engage in an eight-month curriculum from March through October.



Highlands Chamber of Commerce:

Strength In Numbers

FY 2024-2025

217

Business members

Advocacy for your Businesses

REGULAR REPRESENTATION WITH:

Town of Highlands

Macon County

Macon County Economic
Development Commission

Tourism Development Commission

Carolinas Association of Chamber
Executives

Western North Carolina
Tourism Directors

NC State government

Visit NC

Outdoor NC

Association of Chamber
Executives International

Destinations International
Government & Business Committee

New businesses

7

The following businesses opened their doors in FY 24/25 and became active in the business community through the Chamber of Commerce:

Atelier Maison & Co.

The Baked Bunny

Dead Artists Gallery

Rock The Plateau

Summit Sweet Ice Cream

Unfurl Wellness Spa

Western Carolina Brew & Wine



Connection and Engagement

Networking Opportunities



Business After Hours events are one of the Chamber's most popular networking opportunities, bringing members together in a relaxed, social setting at various member-hosted locations. These gatherings allow professionals to strengthen connections, exchange ideas, and showcase their businesses while enjoying refreshments and engaging conversations. By rotating venues among member organizations, Business After Hours highlights the diversity of our local business community.

Our Women in Business events provide a welcoming and empowering space for professional women to connect, learn, and grow together. These gatherings foster conversations on leadership, entrepreneurship, and career advancement. Participants build relationships and gain valuable insights to thrive in today's business landscape.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

COMMUNICATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTERS

26 newsletters for members only with business education opportunities, updates on local, regional and state business offerings and community news.

MONTHLY CALENDARS

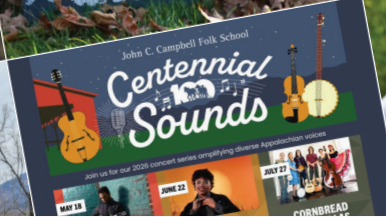
Event calendars are distributed monthly to help business owners and employees answer questions from residents and visitors.

MEMBER FACEBOOK PAGE

202 Members opted in to stay connected to fellow businesses and received member only updates.

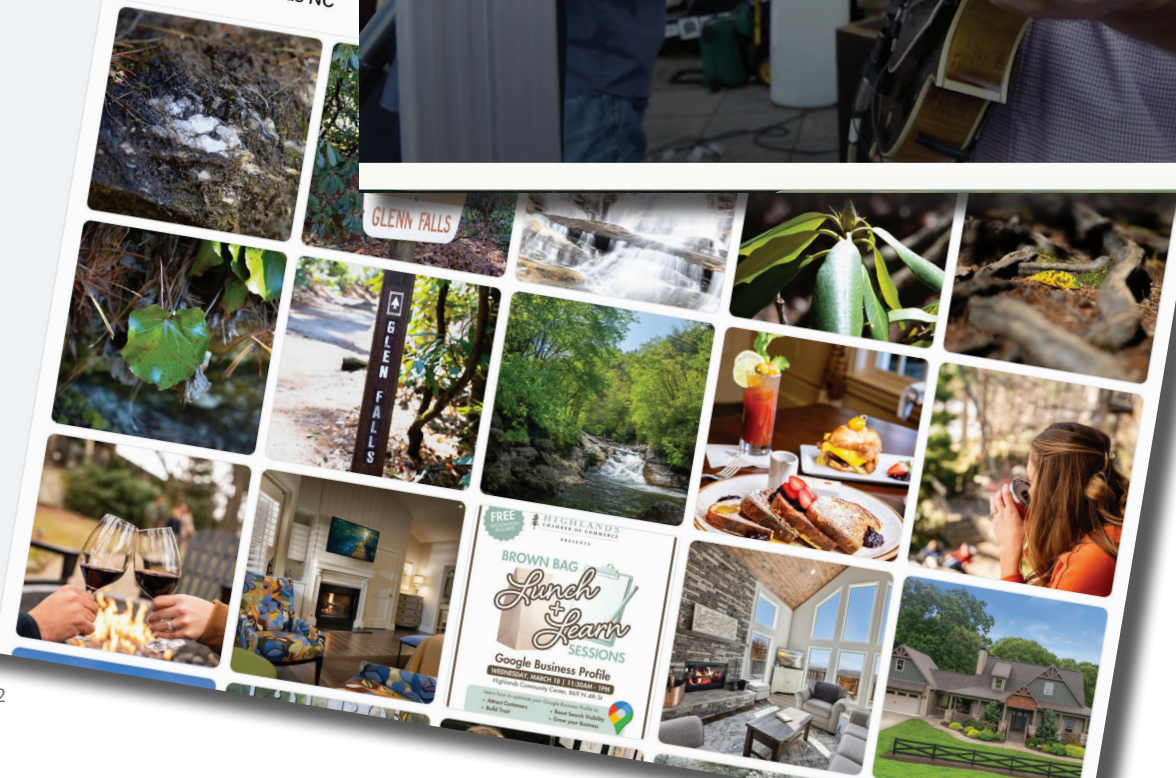
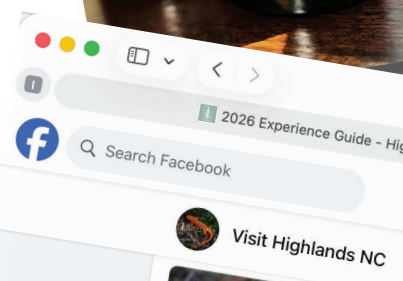
URGENT MESSAGES

Messages from Police Chief Holland, Mayor Pat Taylor, the Town of Highlands and Duke Energy.



Welcome to Highlands! - Highlands Chamber of Commerce
NORTH CAROLINA

THINGS TO DO EVENTS FOOD & DRINK PLACES TO STAY



Marketing and Promotion

Membership provides businesses with the opportunity to advertise in airports, hotels and Welcome Centers throughout the Southeast, social media and newsletters.

WEBSITE

- Annual visits: **197,000**
- Most visited pages: home page, events, things to do
- Top state for visitors: NC, GA, FL
- Hierarchical listings for members, by membership level, over non-members

EXPERIENCE GUIDE

- Total distribution of **25,000**
- Listings: **277**
- 89** business listed in bold font with logo
- 235** business listed in bold font
- Ads (print and digital): **64**
- 44** full page, **13** half page, **7** quarter page

FACEBOOK AUDIENCE 20,060

INSTAGRAM AUDIENCE 27,113

87 businesses spotlighted in social media through their membership

NEWSLETTERS

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Visitor | 4,087 Recipients
52.5% Open Rate
43 member businesses' logos were featured with a link to their website. |
| Community | 323 Recipients
59.9% Open Rate |
| Chamber Member | 429 Recipients
73.2% Open Rate |



WELCOME CENTER

Promoting businesses to visitors and residents through promotional materials and phone calls.

Approximately *4,500* visitors

10 volunteers with hospitality training to answer questions for businesses, residents, and visitors.

12 Brochures Printed for distribution:

- 15 Magical Facts
- Accommodations
- The Arts
- Business Guide and Map
- Dining Guide
- Hiking Guide
- Kids in Highlands
- Mountain Adventures
- Outdoor Concerts
- Night Sky Trail
- Waterfall Guide
- Relocation Guide



OUTDOOR CONCERTS

45 member businesses promoted in signage and from the stage via their membership level

LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Blye Hunsinger
Chair

Shayna Bigazzi

Elizabeth Swift-Bennett

Bill Bubenick

Tricia Cox

Leigh Hartman

Bryan Lewis

Charlotte Muir

Julie Upshaw

STAFF

Kaye McHan
Executive Director

Johanna Fein
*Marketing and
Communications Director*

Tina Rogers
Events Manager and Bookkeeper

Mick Mayer
Digital Marketing Coordinator

Amy Ramey
*Welcome Center and
Volunteer Coordinator*



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visithighlandsc.com