



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,  
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

To: TDA Board  
From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Executive Director  
Date: August 11, 2023  
Subject: Monthly Director's Brief

Dear Board Members,

**Budget Amendments:**

1. **PR Tracking Update:** We've been refining our Public Relations tracking strategy over the recent months. Based on the suggestions from LHG, we have shortlisted Cision/Trendkite as a suitable platform. This addition will result in a \$500/month increase, totaling \$6,000 annually. This system will amplify our ability to trace website traffic originating from editorial features about us, further optimizing visitor conversions.
2. **SEM Budget Allocation:** I recognize an underestimation in this year's allocation for Search Engine Marketing (SEM) – we've budgeted \$10,000 monthly, down from the previous year's \$12,000. To maintain our advertising efficacy, we need to realign to last year's figure, necessitating an additional \$24,000 (\$2,000 monthly). Moreover, considering an integrated SEM approach, an extra \$1,000/month is proposed to leverage our videos on YouTube, aiming for amplified interest towards Jackson County. Therefore, the total proposed SEM budget amendment is \$36,000.

*Note:* The Executive Committee unanimously supports these budget amendments.

**Lodging Insights (June – latest data available):**

In a year-over-year comparison of Smith Travel Research data for Jackson County from June 2022 to 2023, there has been a marginal increase in occupancy (Occ %) by 0.1%, registering 68.6% in 2023 versus 68.5% in 2022. The Average Daily Rate (ADR) experienced a slight decrease of 0.4%, moving from \$168.15 in 2022 to \$167.41 in 2023. The Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) followed a similar trend, decreasing by 0.3% from \$115.21 in 2022 to \$114.82 in 2023. In terms of room revenue, there was a 0.5% decline, with a marginal decrease of 0.1% for both room availability and rooms sold.

In comparison to neighboring counties, Jackson County, NC, demonstrated relative resilience in its lodging metrics for June 2023. While Jackson's occupancy rate saw a slight increase of 0.1% from the previous year, Haywood County experienced a notable decline of 9.3%. Macon County's occupancy decreased by 9.9%, and Swain & Cherokee recorded the steepest decline of 12.7%. Despite a minor drop in ADR and RevPAR, Jackson County's figures remained more stable than most neighbors, with the Western North Carolina region (WNC+) witnessing a 10.3% dip in occupancy and Swain & Cherokee seeing a substantial 22.4% drop in room revenue.

### **Video Marketing Insights:**

- Our collaboration with **Tembo HG** for social media videos is showing positive results. To date, 18 videos have been produced, receiving substantial engagement across platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. For streamlined access, they are cataloged on our [YouTube Shorts page](#). We're also developing a website template for embedding these videos on our homepage.

**TCPF Project Update:** The County Commissioners have greenlighted our Tourism Capital Project Fund projects in Sylva and Dillsboro. Post-approval, a comprehensive funding agreement, which details project roles, payment guidelines, and terms, was created and vetted by our attorney and finance officer, Darlene. Currently, the towns are in the review stage of these agreements.

### **Promotions & Partnerships:**

- **Lodging Specials:** We're actively marketing lodging deals both on our website and through social media channels. Board members associated with accommodations are encouraged to share any promotional deals. These offerings are a significant traffic driver on our website, so early and seasonal specials are highly appreciated.
- **Sustainability Plan for Sylva:** We've partnered with Western Carolina University on a senior capstone project centered on a sustainability audit for Downtown Sylva. This fall, students will engage with merchants and assess current operations, aiming to enhance the town's eco-friendliness. This initiative could potentially set a benchmark for other towns.
- **Conferences:** Our team recently participated in the Destinations International Annual Conference in Dallas. It was a valuable experience, especially for Kara, who attended her first DI conference. Up next is the U.S. Travel's ESTO conference in Savannah, Ga., scheduled for Aug. 19-23.
- **Collaboration with LHG:** We teamed up for an Eagles Nest Outfitters (ENO) influencer trip, showcasing ENO products and promoting our destination's scenic spots. A detailed recap is underway, and our team even managed to employ a professional photographer for capturing marketable content during the event.

### **Other Updates:**

- **Engagement with WCU Athletics:** I had the opportunity to share insights from our 2021 Zartico study on the Homecoming Football game with WCU Athletics' senior leadership. The feedback was positive, emphasizing the game's community impact. With Zartico now integrating spend data, we plan to re-engage this analysis for the Nov. 5 homecoming game, offering even more detailed insights to the University.