

SONOMA COUNTY TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN FY 23-25



SONOMA COUNTY

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Over the course of my time as both chair and a member of the Sonoma County Tourism (SCT) Board of Directors, the organization has dealt with a community and industry in crisis. Through natural and global events that change both this place and our world, our industry has had to prove its resilience time and again. We're hopeful that as we move into the next few years, the time has come that we can look beyond reactive crisis management and with this strategic plan, create a more consistent and long-term direction for the future. This strategic framework, coupled with the Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan, work in tandem to identify a roadmap toward a very promising future.

This plan was developed in collaboration with the Board of Directors, our program committees and the SCT team to help ensure full integration of industry insights, ideas and expertise. As is always the case, the foundation of the plan is research. Through the annual visitor data and economic impact studies and the weekly and monthly STR and AirDNA reports, the organization has a deep understanding of the strengths, weakness, challenges and opportunities facing the destination. It's through this informative lens that decisions are made that influence the direction and programming found in this plan.

We continue to elevate the Life Opens Up brand through programming in both our leisure and business travel sales and marketing efforts. We herald the wine and culinary offerings of the area and enhance awareness of the myriad experiences available in outdoor adventure, wellness, arts and maker immersions, history and cultural journeys and begin touting cannabis all as compelling offerings for visitors. These are showcased throughout the plan as programmatic elements and key messages that create an enticing invitation for travel to Sonoma County. All programming is layered with messages around protecting and preserving the destination through sustainable and responsible travel.

A solid plan is always monitored through trackable Critical Business Objectives (CBOs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). You'll find each appropriately slotted into this plan. We invite you to track achievement toward these goals via the partner page on [SonomaCounty.com](https://www.SonomaCounty.com).

Finally, a great thank you from all of us at SCT to our tremendous partners as we work to accomplish the goals for Sonoma County. Whether through this two-year strategic plan or the long-term Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan, SCT is truly not successful unless our partners are successful. You have our commitment that we put our partners first as we ideate and execute programming. Don't hesitate to let the team know your thoughts for making this plan more beneficial for your business.

Wishing you a very prosperous and success-filled year ahead.



Edward Roe
Chair, Sonoma County Tourism Board of Directors

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

Sonoma County has emerged from the pandemic and several significant crises well prepared to move into the future with great momentum, knowing that tourism will continue to be a key contributor to the regional economy.

As a Destination Stewardship Organization, Sonoma County Tourism (SCT) takes a broad-based view of Sonoma County and the components that contribute to the overall quality of life. This expands the organization's responsibility to the region to include, and go beyond, marketing to leisure and business travelers. The responsibility now includes protecting and preserving the natural, cultural and human resources, helping ensure a strong and professional workforce, collaborating with agencies to provide workforce housing and develop a tourism industry that encourages responsible and meaningful visitor behaviors.

With few exceptions, decisions to move or conduct business, live or attend a school or university in a place all begin with a visit. As a steward of this place, SCT will work with the appropriate local organizations and agencies responsible for the betterment of the people, places and resources to help ensure input into programming that provides year-over-year growth and quality of life improvement.

The FY23-25 strategic plan differs from previous plans in that it has added emphasis on strengthening the quality of life for Sonoma County residents. The organization realizes that all programming must be in the best interest of residents and businesses. The plan includes a greater emphasis on gaining community input and ensuring tourism has a seat at the table during conversations around community issues such as workforce, housing and transportation.



As a Destination Stewardship Organization, the plan includes programming that amplifies the commitment to responsible travel and the protection of the region’s natural and cultural resources. A destination’s dedication to authentic sustainability practices continues to gain traction among travelers, meeting planners, leisure group operators and the media that serves all audiences. Programming in the plan is designed to move this initiative forward in a meaningful way.

Robust destination sales and marketing programming continue to represent the lion share of the budget and the team’s efforts to increase business to partner properties and drive revenue for the destination. Connecting with decision makers in the consumer, leisure group and business group segments is designed to influence purchase decisions and achieve the aspirational key performance indicators in the plan.



Sonoma County Tourism will continue to focus on its key appeals:

- The wine industry and associated experiences;
- Culinary and the connectivity between food, sustainability and placemaking;
- Wellness and self-care most especially as each relates to the needs people have in a post-pandemic environment;
- Sustainability and the entire region’s efforts to protect and preserve the natural resources; and
- Being an inclusive and welcoming destination for all.

These pillars are determined based on a combination of data that shows traveler preferences and behaviors and the assets of the destination. These pillars are not the only messages SCT will provide as salient touchpoints for various audiences (see visitor insights in Appendix A), but they are those that will be the conversation starters for discussions with media, local stakeholders and partners.



This plan sits alongside the Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan that sets a long-term vision for the destination’s future, but has a broader scope than the day-to-day programming in this plan. Some of the key projects outlined in that plan are included as performance metrics in this plan as the staff and financial resources required to move those initiatives forward impact the organization’s capacity to achieve the shorter-term goals outlined herein.

Budget projections for this plan are based on a forecasted moderate six percent (6%) year-over-year increase in revenue for both FY23-24 and FY24-25. This forecast is based on five key factors:

1. Increase in visitation – the return of both business and leisure groups, some international inbound and a continued robust marketing effort;
2. Additional room supply – the STR pipeline shows 194 rooms for FY23-24 and 460 rooms for FY24-25;
3. Continued recovery of San Francisco - most especially for groups/meetings and international travelers;
4. General economic pressures facing travelers/consumers. The threat of a recession throughout 2023, the realities of inflation, increased consumer debt and obstacles to freedom of movement due to rising mortgage rates may impact consumer’s desire to purchase travel. SCT will continue to watch this environment very closely; and
5. Potential weather-related impacts. The World Meteorological Organization is forecasting a significant El Nino event for 2023. For California, this will mean above average winter precipitation and potential for damaging flooding. Whether this directly impacts Sonoma County is yet to be seen, however, we know that news about California weather creates traveler hesitancy, no matter where in the state the weather event is occurring. Extreme weather doesn’t impact travel in the long-run, but can disrupt travel, especially in a destination as tied to outdoor activities as is Sonoma County.

ORGANIZATION MISSION, VISION, VALUES

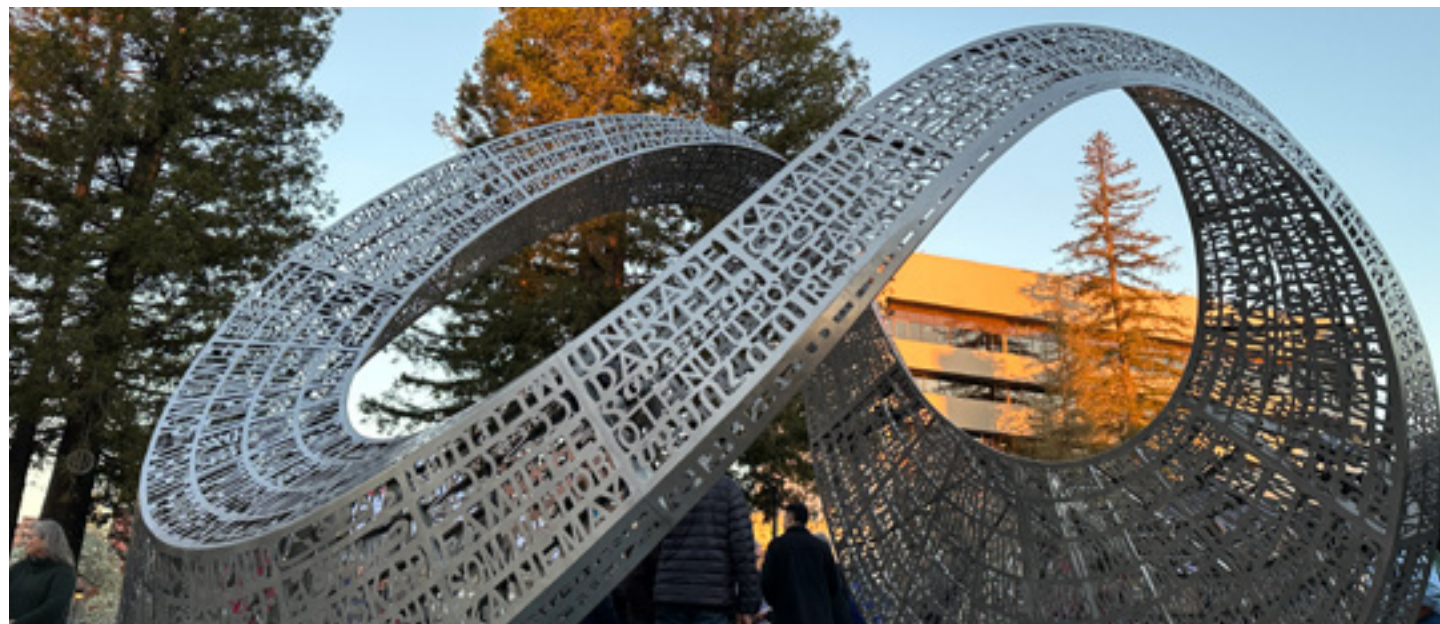


MISSION:

Inspire travel to Sonoma County that strengthens our economy, reflects our diversity and encourages stewardship of our community's resources.

VISION:

Sonoma County will be the leading destination for responsible travelers who enjoy, protect and preserve our community's bountiful natural and cultural resources.



ORGANIZATION VALUES:

- **Trusted** – SCT maintains the confidence of local stakeholders and residents by implementing programs founded on research, driven by best-in-class execution and with results conveyed through partner communications.
- **Transparent** – All budgets and programs administered by SCT are created within an environment of openness and accuracy. SCT's goal is for all stakeholders to trust its operational effectiveness and believe the organization is an efficient steward of the funding provided.
- **Community-Centric** – As a steward of the region, SCT is committed to ensuring local businesses and residents are engaged in the organization's programming and support its direction. SCT understands it is predicated on the success of its partners.
- **Inclusive** – SCT is committed to ensuring persons of all backgrounds are included and welcomed throughout its internal operations and external audience outreach. A strong dedication to diversity, inclusion and equity guides the organization.
- **Entrepreneurial** – SCT operates as an ambitious and nimble business seeking new opportunities for revenue and growth. SCT works to find business development opportunities that drive revenue for partner businesses and generate new revenue for the region and the organization.
- **Creative** – Representing the Life Opens Up brand and a "progressive community of artisans," SCT develops programming with a strategically creative approach. The organization actively seeks innovative ideas and strives to be a "first to market" organization.



ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES

Drive the Economy – Programs developed and administered through Sonoma County Tourism will be focused on ensuring a vibrant economy for Sonoma County and a stellar quality of life for the businesses and employees within the tourism and hospitality industry. Through robust sales and marketing efforts, SCT will bolster the revenue generated through travel and tourism activities.



Create a Resilient Organization – With a history of managing natural, health and financial crises, Sonoma County Tourism is committed to having the foundation needed to ensure it is fortified against all potential impacts. Programs and services will center around building a financially secure organization, ensuring the capacity to prepare for and manage a crisis, building a high-performing and satisfied team, and maintaining full organizational transparency.



Engage the Community – Sonoma County Tourism and the partners it serves are integral members of the Sonoma County community. Through a thoughtful Community Engagement program and as a focus of all marketing and sales initiatives, SCT is dedicated to ensuring the community it represents is integrated into, and benefits from, the organization's programming.



Solidify Commitment to Destination Stewardship – Becoming a Destination Stewardship Organization in 2018, SCT has since developed programming and partnerships that take a broad-based view of the destination. Focusing on responsible and sustainable travel, the organization works to mitigate damage resulting from visitor behavior and creates programming and associated messaging to protect and preserve the area’s fragile natural and cultural resources.



ORGANIZATIONAL CRITICAL BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Overarching Critical Business Objectives (CBOs) lay the foundation for all programs and create a shared vision for the organization. These are the metrics by which the success of the organization will be measured.



PRIORITY 1: DRIVE THE ECONOMY

1. Increase Revenue to Partner Businesses and the County. While SCT cannot directly impact the lodging industry performance factors shown in the STR or AirDNA reports, the organization will, through its marketing and sales efforts, work to elevate brand awareness (cutting through the competitive clutter), increase the consumer inquiries and business leads into the destination and drive the overall revenue into partner businesses and the County.

Working to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic, SCT invested significant funding during FY23-24 into laying a foundation of awareness for both business and leisure, domestic and international visitors. Through benchmark programs including the TODAY show (3rd Hour) broadcast and Start TODAY Wellness Retreat, redesign of SonomaCounty.com, launch of the Sonoma County App, sponsorships and elevated participation in meeting planner associations including CalSAE, MPI and Northstar Meetings Group, reengagement of international representative firms, additional research components such as NEAR data and TravelClick, the organization created a platform on which FY23-25 programming can thrive.

To help increase revenue SCT will engage key strategies. While, depending on market conditions, these may shift slightly in year two of the plan, we anticipate these to continue throughout the plan time period (FY23-25).

- Elevate brand awareness primarily as it encompasses the key brand pillars of wine and food, sustainability, wellness and responsible travel;
- Increase inquiries to SCT's key marketing channels – SonomaCounty.com and the Sonoma County App;
- Elevate engagement across Sonoma County's social channels;
- Incentivize meeting planners to choose Sonoma County;
- Create business-building opportunities for partner properties;
- Increase the number of Sonoma County trip offerings in international tour operator tariffs; and
- Include the vacation rental product as a desirable lodging option.

The overall revenue and growth in key sectors such as taxes generated and employment are measured through the annual Dean Runyan Economic Impact study.



2. Balance Travel Seasonality. Sonoma County Tourism has been charged with intent marketing during the shoulder and off-season time period (November – April) since its inception in 2005. Because of the product offerings and regional nature of current visitation, driving visitation during this period continues to be a challenge. Both the consumer marketing and destination sales teams work to compel travel during this time period.

On the marketing side, advertising and outreach in direct flight markets invites travelers throughout the year and results in longer stays with a higher overall spend. This also balances peak weekend visitation with extended visits that spill into the mid-week.

On the destination sales side, meeting planners are encouraged to take advantage of lower prices and greater availability during the November – April time. Meetings also occur mid-week continuing to flatten the peaks of visitation. Growing in importance, bleisure visits, those including a business trip and leisure time, will help generate additional revenue for partner businesses.

As a destination steward, encouraging travel during this off-peak period also helps balance the impact to the region's natural resources through offerings that are not centered on the fragile coastal and river recreation spots so popular during the summer peak.

To further encourage year-round travel and most especially mid-week and off-season travel, the development of a convention center complex would help punctuate this goal.

This effort requires a multi-faceted and multi-year approach. We do not anticipate breaking ground until several years into the future, however, various factors may influence this timetable.



A convention center will accomplish a number of goals for Sonoma County:

- Enhance the potential for mid-week business, providing a balance between weekend leisure and mid-week business travel;
- Lessen the seasonality of Sonoma County’s visitation with meetings occurring throughout the year including shoulder and quiet seasons;
- Drive revenue into the County and local businesses. Business travelers spend twice as much as leisure travelers when visiting Sonoma County; and
- Provide greater stability for the region’s workforce. Reducing the seasonality of visitation means workers can enjoy a year-round employment environment, creating a more stable and reliable livelihood for families.

Critical objectives for development of a convention center during the upcoming biennium include:

FY23-24:

- Identify the market potential and ideal location.
- Craft and execute a communications and outreach strategy to connect with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

FY24-25:

- Formulate architectural designs and key components of the center and adjoining structures.

3. Create a Compelling Invitation for Hospitality Workers to Choose Sonoma County. Along with industry and government agencies, including the Economic Development Board and the Sonoma County Hospitality Association, SCT will help spearhead programs that showcase the region to potential employees.

Success will be measured by an increase in the number of workers in the hospitality industry and long-term, the number able to live in Sonoma County as reported through tax roles and census data.

PRIORITY 2: CREATE A RESILIENT ORGANIZATION

Resiliency is the capacity of an organization to prepare for and respond to any impact. This can be a crisis, an incident that diminishes organizational reputation or shows a lack of forward planning especially planning that prepares the organization for potential impact. Sonoma County Tourism will work to become more resilient in the face of all potential impacts through creating a structure and approach that will help alleviate potential risks.

1. Increase Funding to SCT. To create a high level of organizational resiliency, Sonoma County Tourism will work to increase its funding by 30% - to \$13 million or more through long-term reliable sources of revenue. This will give the organization the foundation needed to manage ongoing programming and respond to any impacts.

Success will be achieved when SCT gains 30% or more in long-term funding.

2. Elevate Commitment to and Programming Around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEI+A). To help both SCT and its county-wide partner businesses recognize the importance and need to integrate DEI+A policies, SCT will work to lay the foundation for meaningful programming internally and for partners.

Success will be the integration of a DEI program of work for the organization and a platform or other tool that partners can use to integrate their own DEI & A initiatives.



3. Administer an Effective and Transparent Operation

As a contributor to, and recipient of, public funds through the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT), Sonoma County Tourism ensures its operational practices align with accounting and operational best practices. Through oversight of the Finance & Legal Committee and the Board of Directors, the budget and allocation of dollars are given careful scrutiny.

Forecasting and budgeting for FY23-25 should fall back into a more normalized cadence. The uncertainties and dramatic swings of the previous five years should now be more balanced giving SCT a better chance to budget and allocate funds in alignment with the programs outlined in this plan. To this end, SCT will continue its annual audit with a County-approved auditing firm and will report all findings to the Finance & Legal Committee, Board of Directors and the County.

Success will be realized with accurate financial forecasting (within 10% of actual), a favorable annual audit and utilization of the program budgets to achieve the KPIs outlined in this plan.

4. Create a Highly Engaged Board of Directors and Committees

Sonoma County Tourism is guided by its Board of Directors and Committees, making their engagement in all aspects of the organization critically important.

Achievement of this objective will be determined through an annual board and committees survey as well as ongoing participation in meetings and events. Success will be an overall satisfaction level of 90% or higher.

5. Ensure a Highly Satisfied, High Performing Team

The capacity for SCT to achieve the goals outlined in this plan and be an employer of choice is dependent on a professional team that is valued and empowered. Working collaboratively across all departments, coalescing around shared goals and values and having the skills and tools required to succeed at jobs is critical for success of the organization.

Success will be measured through a year-over-year increase in employee survey satisfaction scores.

PRIORITY 3: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

1. Provide Greater Opportunities for Community Input. Ensure ongoing opportunities for residents to provide input into Sonoma County Tourism's initiatives, including those outlined in the master plan. This will help ensure a higher level of understanding and potentially support, from residents.

Overarching success will be measured in both the number of touchpoints between SCT and residents and the satisfaction scores of residents through an annual survey.

2. Increase Engagement with Tourism Industry Partners. SCT will continue to develop business building opportunities for its partners and provide both financial and intellectual resources designed to create success.

Success will be measured through an increase in partner participation in SCT programs and the satisfaction scores obtained during an annual partner survey.

3. Elevate Awareness of, and Discussions Around, Sonoma County's Culture and Heritage.

Tourism has generally taken a Pollyanna approach to culture and heritage, framing this in a completely positive light. Sonoma County Tourism recognizes that while part of the region's history can be celebrated and held amongst its most cherished key appeals, components of history need to be addressed in a more meaningful and authentic way. As identified in the Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan, spurring conversation around all aspects of our history, will move the destination forward in a more realistic way.

During the next two years, SCT will work with organizations, history centers, learned individuals and other institutions to help surface the true history and unique culture of Sonoma County.

A part of this dialogue will be conveyed through the Neighborhoods Program. This program will connect municipalities, unique voices and untold stories to residents and visitors.

Tied to the metrics in the Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan, success will be realized when 50 authentic oral and written histories are uploaded to the website. The Neighborhood Project will be measured through the completion of ten programs per fiscal year.



PRIORITY 4: SOLIDIFY COMMITMENT TO DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP



1. Elevate the Position of Sonoma County Within the Sustainability Space. Although Sonoma County has established itself as a leader in sustainable travel, SCT can continue to solidify this position and provide additional opportunities for its partners. The creation of the Manager, Sustainability and Climate Initiatives has provided SCT with greater insights into this arena and opportunities to create first-to-market solutions and opportunities for partners.

Success in this area will be around how SCT is able to elevate the destination through certification, opportunities for speaking engagements and number of partners who create new or advance sustainability offerings.

2. Enhance Partnerships with Sustainability Brands. SCT has worked with organizations such as Leave No Trace and Kind Traveler for several years and developed foundational programming, yet more can be done to engage local partners and convey the programming to visitors.

As sustainability grows within the meeting sector, the opportunity to engage meeting planners with Sonoma County's commitment to sustainability is greater than ever. Helping ensure venues/hotel brands are aligned around the sustainability value will be critical for success.

Success will be in the number of new partnerships achieved and increasing the partner participation in current partnerships.

3. Position Sonoma County as a Leader in the Climate Change Imperative. California is working to become a global leader in mitigating climate change. With the commitment of both the winegrowing and tourism industries, Sonoma County can become a partner with the state to move climate change initiatives forward.

As this program is in its infancy, success will be realized in how SCT is able to position the destination within statewide climate change initiatives and to be seen as a thought leader in this space.



PROGRAMMING & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

The Critical Business Objectives drive the organization and provide overarching goals for key initiatives. The components of the Programming and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) section showcase the work of the team and ladder up to the overall CBOs.

PRIORITY 1: DRIVE THE ECONOMY

1. Increase Revenue to Partner Businesses and the County

Research

All SCT programming is informed by the data derived through research. During FY23-25, SCT will continue to add research that helps inform all departments to ensure decisions are made solely based on insights gained through research. Of critical importance is ensuring partners are aware of and understand how to integrate research into their plans and tactical programming. SCT will work during the FY23-25 biennium to both gain the needed research to inform its own efforts and convey the research to partners. This will be accomplished through a multi-pronged research program.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Track industry performance (all components of the tourism ecosystem) to better inform SCT's marketing and sales programming. This will include:
 - » Tourism Economics Dashboard – amalgamating all research into one overview
 - » STR weekly, monthly and custom hotel lodging performance reports
 - » AirDNA vacation rental industry monthly reports
 - » VisaVue cardholder spending data
 - » NEAR geolocation data to amplify understanding of visitor behavior
 - » TravelClick hotel booking data to understand and fill need periods
 - » Media and website attribution modeling to provide visitor insights on those who saw media or website ads/campaigns and arrived in market



- Track year-over-year economic impact through a partnership with Visit California and Dean Runyan Associates Economic Impact modeling. Obtain additional city-specific information.
- Gain annual visitation insights through the Longwoods International Travel USA® survey.
- Determine marketing campaign effectiveness through the Longwoods International ROI study.
- Provide insights to partners via the Tourism Industry Performance & Insights e-newsletter allowing them to shape sales and marketing initiatives informed by research.

Marketing

Throughout the upcoming biennium, the Marketing and Communications team will continue its long-term strategy to create compelling and authentic messaging around the organization’s key pillars. As tentpole strategic elements, the department will:

1. Move into Phase II of its Marketing-Communications strategy roadmap: Communicate Impact and Showcase Value and Authenticity. To further establish Sonoma County as a leading destination for responsible travelers, we will build upon our “Invite and Inform” phase by showcasing authentic stories that demonstrate Sonoma County’s commitment to sustainability and highlight distinctive and compelling travel experiences.
2. Enact a “Storymining & Storylining” strategy that integrates across paid, owned, earned and shared channels. This will identify messaging and seasonality gaps, gain input from SCT partners, showcase the distinctive stories and profiles of Sonoma County luminaries. It also will help SCT create story ideas and creative assets that highlight unique and authentic Sonoma County travel experiences.

These strategies will be supported through programming and associated key performance metrics:

- Create additional opportunities to leverage the TODAY Show project, to create incremental exposure of, and buzz for, the destination.



- Move into Phase II of SCT’s cannabis strategy, which will create new opportunities to message about Sonoma County’s tourism-facing cannabis offerings.
 - » Develop cannabis landing page with content, events and partner listings
- Launch new website and related optimization program (content audit, SEO, paid search).
- Continue development of the Sonoma County App to include multi-day planning, scavenger hunts, and loyalty components, amongst others.
 - » Increase app downloads by 10% Year over Year (YoY)
 - » Increase active users by 10% YoY
- Continue to implement updates and enhancements across our owned channels, that work to increase “intent to travel” actions.
 - » Increase website traffic 10% YoY
 - » Increase email subscriber list by 10% YoY
 - » Increase social followers (IG, TT, FB) by 10% YoY across all platforms
 - » In partnership with Community Engagement, increase Travel Kindly Pledge signups by 5% YoY
- Drive high levels of ROI on annual consumer marketing campaign that exceed \$262:\$1.
- In collaboration with Research, establish a baseline attribution model, leveraging our partnership with Tourism Economics and Near.



Public Relations

As the key driver of the brand story, the public relations team will work with both domestic and international media outlets to curate stories that showcase the brand and depth of Sonoma County's offerings. This will be accomplished through:

- Continue to develop key messages that support SCT's key pillars. These serve as a baseline for our story ideas and are also made available to our partners to connect with and support their own messaging.
- Using our key messages as a foundation, curate breakthrough story ideas that surface and support Sonoma County's pillars including responsible travel, destination stewardship, wellness, food/wine and outdoor recreation.
- Maintain Barcelona Principles score of at least 7/10, within our primary story idea topics.
- International: Secure earned media coverage in our targeted international markets of the UK, Germany and Australia via the partnerships with our international offices.
- Secure earned media coverage in our targeted domestic markets through a coordinated effort, in partnership with our integrated agency.



Destination Sales

As business travel continues its comeback momentum and SCT works to elevate the awareness of Sonoma County as a vibrant meeting destination, the team will continue its focus on key market segments including corporate, incentive and association meeting groups. Providing business building opportunities, offering financial incentives and identifying enhanced collaboration will lay a critical foundation for programming.

- Achieve a 10% year-over-year increase in leads distributed to the partner lodging properties.
- Achieve 12,000 SCT influenced contracted group room nights throughout Sonoma County.
- Increase 1:1 meetings and connections with meeting planners and clients by 10% of previous year actuals.
- Monitor TravelClick room night bookings to identify need periods and convey strategy for filling to the Business Development Committee.





Travel Trade

Travel Trade is focused on generating bookings from leisure groups in both the US and international markets. International inbound travel has been challenged even post-COVID in restarting a normalized inbound volume. To ensure Sonoma County is among the first-to-market destinations, international representative firms were established during FY23-24.

The next two years will be focused on raising brand awareness and reengaging tour operators, wholesalers and travel agents to generate offers for Sonoma County. This effort does not live in a vacuum. Educating these key buyers is done not only through a sales-driven effort, but also with a robust media relations outreach. Information on SCT's programming for the international market is contained in the above Public Relations section. Key performance metrics include:

Generate 10 new Tour Operator programs and itineraries for Sonoma County.

- Increase product development and offerings in each primary market, UK, Germany, Australia, by 10%.
- Inspire 5,000 leisure / travel trade room nights at Sonoma County BIA or TOT contributing properties.
- Increase 1:1 meetings and connections with travel trade professionals and clients by 10% of previous year actuals.
- Host a minimum of 6 inbound FAM tours with travel agents, tour operators and travel trade professionals.



Business Development

Key components in the Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan require a heightened effort in general business development. Working with developers, permitting agencies and organizations outside the “normal” scope of work, SCT will become more intentional about developing a robust tourism industry business infrastructure.

Business Development also will be the department that works closely with the Sonoma County Airport (STS) to assist with route development and ongoing initiatives to bring business to the airport.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Work with STS to achieve its growth strategy, helping to provide data to support the strategy.
- Maintain a pipeline of development projects and companies funding the projects. Provide a monthly report to the SCT Board of Directors.
- Monitor the TravelClick data to identify need periods and convey opportunities to lodging properties through a quarterly industry e-newsletter.

2. Balance Travel Seasonality

Sonoma County Tourism is charged with driving travel during the off-peak times of November – April. Not only does this balance numbers and mitigate overcrowding, it also provides protection for the region’s natural resources and creates a more stable environment for the hospitality workforce. Work on this strategy will be done by all departments within SCT.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Execute intent marketing and sales programming designed to drive off-season visitation. In alignment with SCT’s mandate to create year-round demand for Sonoma County and most importantly within the November – April timeframe, SCT’s marketing and sales groups will address this through various program elements, including:
 - » Create marketing campaigns that reach direct flight markets, helping to drive revenue through longer stays and stays that extend beyond the weekend
 - » Work with partner venues to emphasize and incentivize meetings help between November – April and during mid-week time periods



- Lay the foundation for development of a convention center.
 - » Identify a consultant and conduct a feasibility study that lays the foundation for a convention center, including potential locations that meet the needs of the business traveler and Sonoma County community
 - » Identify creative funding solutions to ensure the center has the resources needed to become a highly functional and appealing facility
 - » Work with developers, city and county permitting and other investors/partners to gain perspectives and input and to discuss feasibility of a convention center,
 - * Design to properly reflect the Sonoma County brand and image
 - * Ample space to include community focused outlets as well as function space for groups, meetings and special events
 - » Ensure the facility encapsulates the Sonoma County commitment to sustainability, such as LEED certification, solar energy, and other renewable energy solutions
 - » Ensure efficient facility ingress and egress for vehicular traffic
 - » Collaborate with residents and other stakeholders to develop a crisis plan for the facility that will be available to house residents during need periods

3. Create a Compelling Invitation for Hospitality Workers to Choose Sonoma County

Along with industry and government agencies, including the Economic Development Board and the Sonoma County Hospitality Association, SCT will help spearhead programs that showcase the region to potential employees.

Key Performance Indicators:

FY23-24:

- Create communication pieces and strategy for distribution that showcase which job types and openings are needed throughout the industry (as specific as possible by job type). Help identify pipelines for those job types.
- Partner with the Career Technical Education (CTE) Foundation, and involve 3 hospitality partners in its internship program (* January of 2024 for placement June 2024).
- Partner with SCHA to increase membership through the Accredited Hospitality Professional (AHP) program. Increase SCHA membership by 20% with AHP members.
- Representation by SCT staff at community meetings around workforce, tourism, housing, etc.
- Increase AHP fully accredited participants by 50%.
- Integrate AHP into 3 high school programs.
- Create an internal job posting, match, internship and apprentice feature for partners. During creation, collaborate with local Chambers and the Small Business Development Center.

FY24-25:

- Explore and create a potential job education/event/fair FAM to Sonoma County with educational opportunities, housing exploration, partner employment opportunities, introduction to SCHAs, etc. Work with Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma State and other Bay Area/Sacramento schools that have a hospitality program.
- Research and start to establish scholarship program and internships within the AHP program.
- Increase CTE Foundation internship partners to 5 for 2025.

PRIORITY 2: CREATE A RESILIENT ORGANIZATION

1. Increase Funding to SCT

To create a high level of organizational resiliency, Sonoma County Tourism will work to increase its funding by 30% - to \$13 million or more through long-term reliable sources of revenue. This will give the organization the foundation needed to manage ongoing programming and respond to any impacts.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Forge bonds with the vacation rental industry so that the value of the partnership results in the sector becoming an investor for Sonoma County Tourism's destination marketing initiatives. Increase vacation rental offerings on SonomaCounty.com by 100% year-over-year.
 - Create at least two shared pieces of content that highlights vacation rentals.
 - Create a certification (badge) for vacation rentals that can be used to highlight property adherence to high standards.
- Identify new partnerships with non-BIA lodging properties and municipalities that result in benefits that include additional funding to SCT.



2. Elevate Commitment to and Programming Around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEI+A)

To help both SCT and its county-wide partner businesses recognize the importance and need to integrate DEI+A policies, SCT will work to lay the foundation for meaningful programming internally and for partners:

Key Performance Indicators:

- Hire a DEI+A consultant to assist Sonoma County Tourism to identify and integrate DEI principles and practices into its operation.
- Complete a full accessibility assessment identifying gaps and opportunities for partner properties to better welcome persons with physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities. Develop an action plan based on the report's findings.
- Ensure key marketing outreach and consumer channels adhere to accessibility best practices and convey opportunities for visitors who require accessible offerings.
 - » Prioritize and implement elements of the accessibility roadmap, developed in FY22/23. Merge this effort with accessibility assessment.
- Increase development/re-development of DEI&A content YoY.
- Increase YoY the number of DEI&A story ideas produced.
- Increase YoY the number of DEI&A journalists/influencers hosted, whose assignment aligns with SCT's DEI&A key messages and story ideas.
- Create a toolkit that outlines ways businesses can craft their own DEI+A program

3. Administer an Effective and Transparent Operation

Risk-taking is the hallmark of an innovative organization. A publicly funded organization, however, is allowed the amount of risk only commensurate with the level of trust its stakeholders have in the organization. To ensure a high level of trust by both internal and external stakeholders, SCT will increase its level of transparency and work to ensure its operational effectiveness is without reproach.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Annual audit has two or fewer exceptions and is completed on or before Dec. 15, 2023.
- Monthly financials are posted to SonomaCounty.com.
- SCT will complete the annual report and marketing plan and deliver the document to the County on or before the stated deadline, allowing sufficient time for staff review, and approval from Board of Directors, Economic Development Board and Board of Supervisors.
- With input from the Finance and Legal Committee, the Board and the respective program committees, the SCT leadership team will be responsible for managing the budget within their program areas and will track the ongoing budget usage to ensure proper expenditures.
- Sonoma County Tourism will incorporate the best practices of accounting including invoicing and paying bills according to organizational policy. Full policies and procedures for best practice accounting will be expanded and distributed to the staff and board.
- SCT's employee handbook is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
- SCT's overall policies and procedures are reviewed and updated.

4. Create a Highly Engaged Board of Directors and Committees

Ensuring a highly engaged board and committees requires a high level of trust, timely communications and opportunities that excite and interest members. Helping to ensure both board and committee members are engaged in the work of the organization, SCT will work to achieve the following

Key Performance Indicators:

- Provide tools for board and committees to champion Sonoma County Tourism. These include:
 - » Organizational strategic plan
 - » Department action plans
 - » Research/economic impact figures that help convey the performance of the industry and of SCT
- Ensure all have talking points salient for the time period or to specific initiatives that provide information pertinent to constituents.
- Ensure meetings allow for ample input and discussion around critical elements that guide the organization.
- Offer opportunities for connecting with partners and other stakeholders such as topical thought leadership discussions and mixers.



5. Ensure a Highly Satisfied, High Performing Team

The success of this plan is dependent on a team that's provided with the resources and support needed to rise to the aspirations of the objectives and key performance indicators outlined. This begins with ensuring SCT hires motivated, talented professionals but more importantly continues with a day-to-day environment that supports all aspects of the employee's work life. SCT has worked hard to elevate its attention to the team, most especially through and coming out of the pandemic, but the work continues.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Year-over-year increases in employee satisfaction scores through the annual employee survey.
- Year-over-year increase in employees participating in professional development opportunities.
- Turn-over-rate of two or fewer employees per year.
- Annual compensation survey shows SCT employees in the top 90% of California destination marketing organization salaries.

PRIORITY 3: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

1. Provide Greater Opportunities for Community Input

Ensure ongoing opportunities for residents to provide input into Sonoma County Tourism's initiatives, including those outlined in the master plan, to ensure a higher level of understanding and potentially support, from residents.

Key Performance Indicators:

FY23-24:

- Launch annual resident sentiment survey.
- SCT team members active on committees/boards of partners/foundations; non-tourism sector (4 key areas).
- SCT team members participate/present at a MAC meeting in each jurisdiction.
- Convene 5 local town halls for stakeholders including, but not limited to, neighborhood groups, community newspapers, non-profit organizations, Chambers of Commerce, service clubs, youth sports, partners and key community event planners.
- Launch The Neighborhood Project video / content series highlighting the different towns and cities within Sonoma County. Five (5) census areas to be included in the launch, but 10 to be highlighted by June 2024.

FY24-25:

- See a positive increase in resident sentiment over previous year.
- Increase in SCT team members place on committees/boards in non-tourism sector by 75%.
- SCT team members participate/present at a MAC meeting in each jurisdiction.
- Convene 5 local town halls for stakeholders including, but not limited to, neighborhood groups, community newspapers, non-profit organizations, Chambers of Commerce, service clubs, youth sports, partners and key community event planners.
- Expand The Neighborhood Project to include video/content to all SCT contributing municipalities, including small towns and smaller communities.



2. Elevate Engagement with Tourism Industry Partners

SCT will continue to develop business building opportunities for its partners and provide both financial and intellectual resources designed to create success.

Key Performance Indicators:

FY23-24:

- Conduct an annual partner survey to assess partner sentiment toward SCT and its value. Gain an overall score of 80% Satisfied or Highly Satisfied.
- Conduct experiential assessment of major county-wide points of interest. Incorporate a partner from EACH sector and visitor centers/chambers in each municipality. Develop education trainings on key areas & highlight those needed areas in AHP continuing education.
- Continue monthly Hospitality Collaboratives in featured municipalities; toggling with mixers; 6-8 partners per event; increase attendance with AHP invitees (max 10 per collaborative).
- Hold two Elected Officials Coffee + Collaboratives.



- SCT team members assigned to each chamber, visitor center; being present where relevant for at least 2 per year per municipality plus mixer attendance when available.
- Conduct a robust National Travel and Tourism Week activation
 - » Engage partners through the Stars of the Industry event – increase number of entries, votes and event attendance YoY
 - » Create program that visually showcases the destination’s celebration of tourism
 - » Convey economic impact findings
 - » Connect with elected officials and other stakeholders to elevate the value of tourism
 - » Illustrate the industry’s desire to give back to communities through a Tourism Cares activity

FY24-25:

- Annual partner survey to increase in Satisfied or Highly satisfied to 90%.
- Conduct a follow-up customer experience survey to measure progress and identify holes.
- Elevate the Hospitality Collaborative to include 6-10 residents. Launch of one County Collaborative inviting partners in similar hospitality sectors but cross-county.
- Increase team attendance to chamber/visitor center meetings by 50% and continue the above education efforts.

- Conduct a robust National Travel and Tourism Week activation
 - » Engage partners through the Stars of the Industry event – increase number of entries, votes and event attendance YoY
 - » Create program that visually showcases the destination’s celebration of tourism
 - » Convey economic impact findings
 - » Connect with elected officials and other stakeholders to elevate the value of tourism
 - » Illustrate the industry’s desire to give back to communities through a Tourism Cares activity



3. Elevate Awareness of, and Discussions Around, Sonoma County’s Culture and Heritage

Working closely with partners at arts and cultural organizations, SCT will amplify the stories, challenges and triumphs of the region’s historical and cultural communities.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Identify historical and cultural communities and select key storytellers for each.
- In partnership with historical societies and cultural educators, curate 25 oral or written histories per year, uploading each to SonomaCounty.com.





PRIORITY 4: SOLIDIFY COMMITMENT TO DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

1. Elevate the Value of Sustainability. Although Sonoma County has established itself as a leader in sustainable travel, SCT can continue to solidify this position and provide additional opportunities for its partners. Putting the commitment into action across the destination will be key for the upcoming time period.

Key Performance Indicators:

FY23-24:

- Develop a robust database of the sustainability initiatives being offered by partners so that they can be easily identified and amplified to journalists, meeting planners and for appropriate marketing opportunities.
- Attain Green Destinations certification for Sonoma County. Through working with Green Destinations, a Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) accredited certification organization, SCT will become a certified destination within the framework outlined.

FY24-25:

- Where Green Destinations may identify opportunities for improvement within certain criteria, engage in a sustainability management cycle aimed at advancement in these areas.
- Based on results of the partner sustainability database, identify holes in sustainability programming, and hold at least one partner engagement session providing information and resources to support the adoption of new sustainable practices.



2. Enhance Partnerships with Sustainability Brands

While SCT has worked with sustainability focused organizations and developed foundational programming, more can be done to engage local partners and convey the programming to visitors.

Key Performance Indicators:

FY23-24:

- Hold a partner education session for lodging partners promoting the Kind Traveler platform and “Every Stay Gives Back” initiative.
- Advance the number of Leave No Trace Coalition partners by 25%.
- Work with Regional Parks leadership to encourage/inspire greater integration of Leave No Trace Coalition messaging and visuals into Parks’ materials.

FY24-25:

- Advance the number of Leave No Trace Coalition partners by an additional 25%.
- Explore opportunities with other land managers, such as state parks or non-profit organizations, to include Leave No Trace messaging into their visitor facing materials.



3. Position Sonoma County as a Leader in the Climate Change Imperative

While SCT has worked closely with sustainability partnerships, the climate change initiative is one that is broader than SCT and even than the tourism industry. But, it is a critical driver of the future well-being of the planet, so within the People, Planet and Profit sustainability triad, SCT will work to move this imperative forward.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Assess the potential of becoming a signatory to the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. This declaration aims to lead and align climate action across tourism stakeholders, including government and institutional agencies; donors and financial institutions; international organizations; civil society; the private sector; and academia. Becoming a signatory on the Declaration requires a destination to:
 - » Adopt the policies and practices within 12 months of becoming a signatory;
 - » Deliver climate action plans within 12 months of signing and implementing them accordingly; and
 - » Report publicly both progress against interim and long-term targets, as well as the actions being taken, at least annually.



- Explore the Potential for Creating an Annual Climate Change Summit. An annual summit would bring together thought leaders in this area for substantive conversations around the impacts of and potential solutions to combat climate change – most especially as they relate to tourism and natural resources.
 - » Complete an inventory of current climate change summits, and determine what the differentiator would be for a summit in Sonoma County.
 - » In FY24-25, identify if financial resources allow, hold first summit, or determine if it should be held in 2025-26.
- Improve the Carbon Offset Calculator Opportunity
 - » Identify ways to make this easier for visitors to find and more compelling to use
 - * Incentivize users through sustainability-focused in-market values

SUMMARY

The economic impact estimates associated with traveler spending in Sonoma County were measured using the Regional Travel Impact Model (RTIM) developed by Dean Runyan Associates and are comparable to those found in the 2022p California State, Regional & County Impacts report prepared for Visit California.

Further information from Visit California: <https://industry.visitcalifornia.com/research/economic-impact>

Travel related spending in Sonoma County saw a tremendous gain in 2022; the \$2.29 billion generated by indirect and direct visitor spending surpassed 2021 levels by 18.7% and pre-pandemic 2019 levels by 2.7%. In fact, Sonoma County was one of only 20 of the state’s 58 counties to surpass pre-pandemic visitor spending, and one of only two counties (besides Marin County) in the North Bay Region to do so.

Sonoma County Direct Travel Impacts, 2018-2022

	Spending (\$Millions) Direct and Indirect	Earnings (\$Millions)	Employment (Jobs)	Local Taxes (\$Millions)	State Taxes (\$Millions)	Total Taxes (\$Millions)
2018	2,200	815	22,380	108	91	199
2019	2,237	863	22,360	110	95	205
2020	1,250	653	16,290	74	61	135
2021	1,938	763	17,610	115	80	195
2022	2,299	931	21,150	130	93	223
2021-2022 Change	+18.7%	+22%	+20.1%	+13%	+16.3%	+14.4%

Sonoma County Direct Travel Impacts: Cities, 2022

	Spending (\$Millions)	YoY Change	Earnings (\$Millions)	Employment (Jobs)	Local Taxes (\$Millions)	State Taxes (\$Millions)	Total Taxes (\$Millions)
Cloverdale	14.3	+37%	5.8	131	0.8	0.6	1.4
Healdsburg	239.5	+6%	97.0	2,203	13.6	9.7	23.2
Petaluma	174.6	+36%	70.7	1,606	9.9	7.0	16.9
Rohnert Park	160.0	+15%	64.8	1,472	9.1	6.5	15.5
Santa Rosa	419.7	+33%	170.1	3,861	23.7	16.9	40.7
Sebastopol	27.3	+31%	11.0	251	1.5	1.1	2.6
Sonoma	219.5	+57%	88.9	2,019	12.4	8.9	21.3
Unincorporated	961.6	+5%	389.6	8,846	54.5	38.8	93.2
Windsor	82.5	+24%	33.4	759	4.7	3.3	8.0
Total Sonoma County	2,299	+18%	931.5	21,148	130.1	92.8	222.9

Spending in the hotel, motel and short-term rental segment increased by 11% over 2021 levels comprising a 43% share of overnight trips, and spending on camping stays classified in the other overnight category in the table below, increased by 26% over 2021 levels. The following table provides total and average spending estimates for overnight travelers to Sonoma County in 2022.

Average Travel Spending by Overnight Visitors in Sonoma County, 2022*

	Visitor Spending (\$Millions)	Travel Party Per Day	Travel Party Per Trip	Person Per Day	Person Per Trip	Length of Stay	Party Size
Hotel, Motel, STVR	1,239	\$743	\$2,026	\$297	\$805	2.7	2.5
Private Home	208	\$110	\$385	\$52	\$183	3.5	2.1
Other Overnight	211	\$209	\$643	\$79	\$240	3.1	2.7
All Overnight	1,659	\$362	\$1,119	\$153	\$466	3.1	2.4

*The spending figures shown represent expenditures on all travel related commodities in the destination for each category of overnight visitor. STVR: Short-term vacation rental.

Visitor Spending by Type of Commodity Purchased, 2018-2022 (\$Millions)

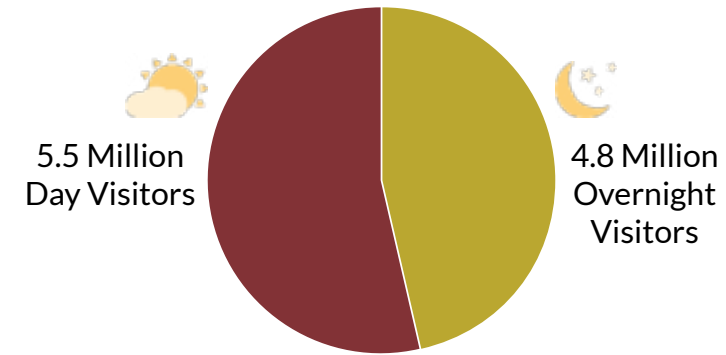
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Accommodations	510.2	504.7	289.9	576.0	656.6
Food Service	562.9	580.2	355.5	491.6	567.4
Food Stores	67.5	69.1	38.6	77.1	83.5
Local Transport/Gas	178.9	183.7	81.5	141.7	173.1
Arts/ Entertainment/ Recreation	352.9	354.4	194.6	271.4	305.9
Retail Sales	339.7	348.2	187.1	264.6	318.8
Visitor Air Transport	12.5	14.1	5.3	12.0	21.5
All Destination Spending	2,024	2,054	1,161	1,864	2,127

Notes:

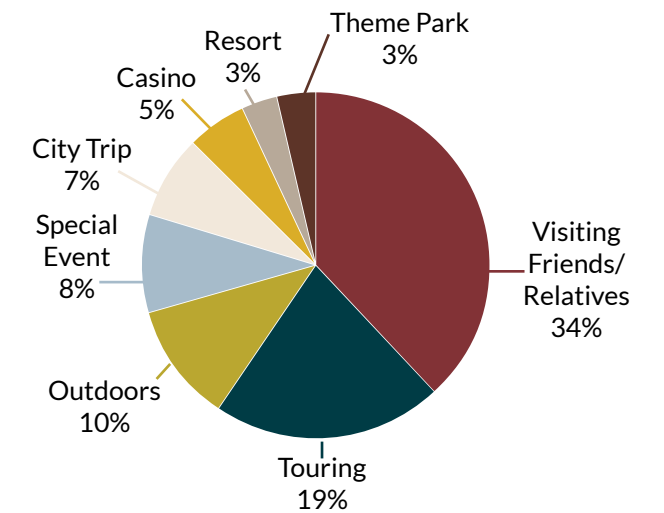
- Totals may not add exactly due to rounding.
- Retail includes gasoline.
- Local tax receipts include transient occupancy tax, sales tax and passenger facility charges paid by visitors, and property tax payments and sales tax payments attributable to the travel industry income of employees and businesses.
- State tax receipts include, sales tax and motor fuel tax payments paid by visitors, and income tax payments and sales tax payments attributable to the travel industry income of employees and businesses.

APPENDIX B – 2022 DOMESTIC VISITOR PROFILE – QUICK FACTS

**Total Visitors to Sonoma County
10.3 Million**



Main Purpose of Leisure Trip



Average Size of Overnight Travel Party



Average Length of Stay



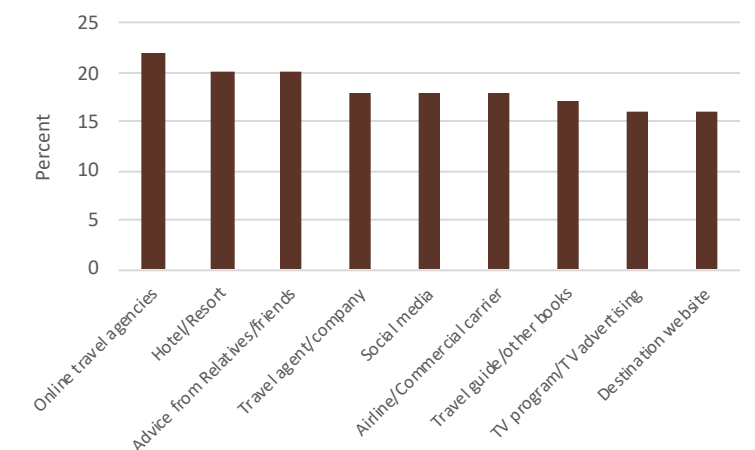
Season of Overnight Trip



Top Feeder States for Overnight Trips



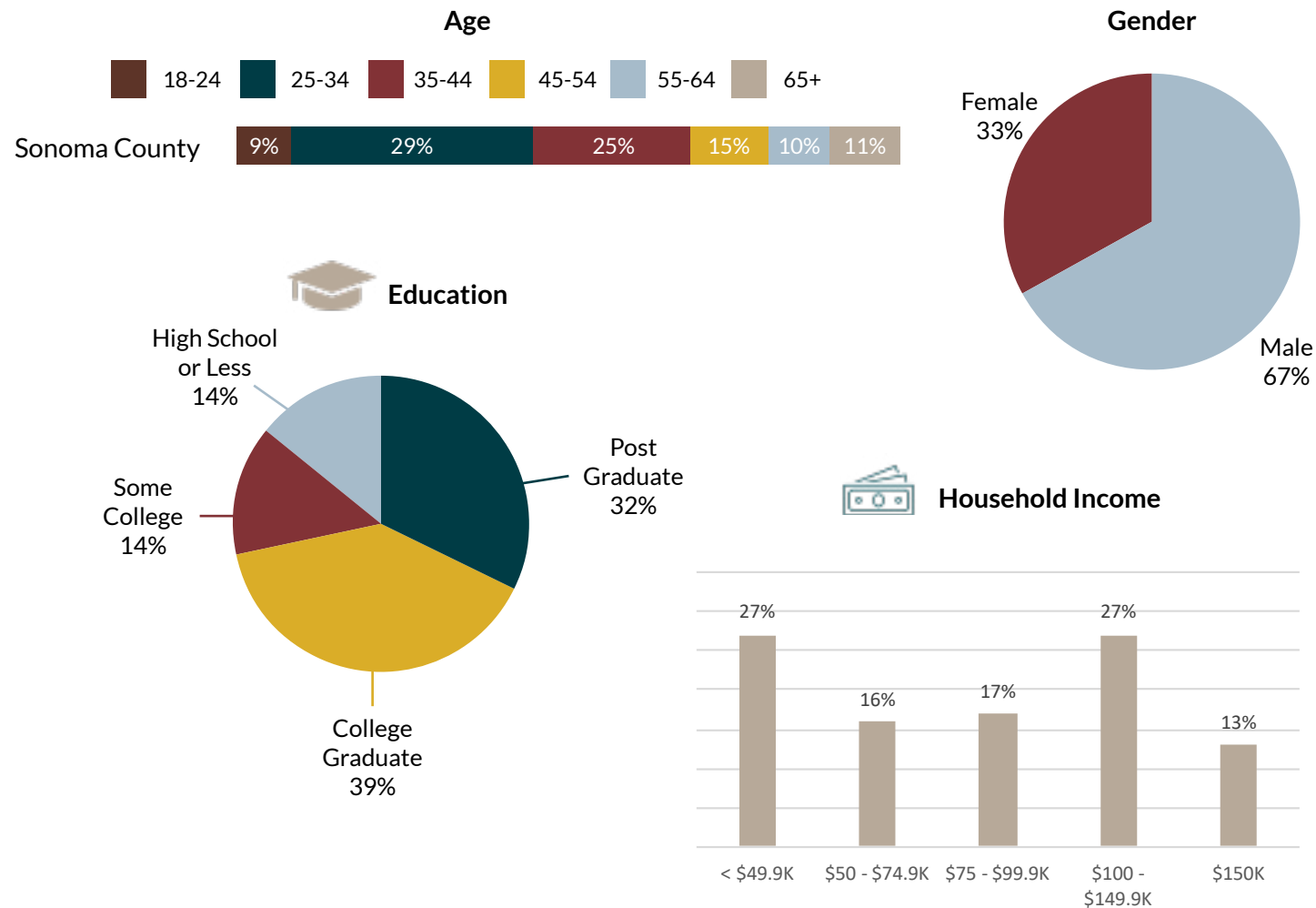
Trip Planning Information Services



Top 10 Activities and Experiences for Overnight Trips



Demographic Profile of Overnight Visitors



Business Travel

Percent of Overnight Visitation Related to Business Activities

31%

Business Visitor Spending

Business travelers spend twice as much as leisure travelers on a per transaction basis.

2x

Top Spending Categories

Top three categories for business visitor spending in Sonoma County are: Hotels and Lodging; Entertainment and Retail

International Visitors

Top International Origin Markets



Other top international origin markets: Germany, Australia, France, India

4.3 days
Average Length of Stay

87%
Overnight Visitors

29%
Repeat Visitors

Sources: Longwoods International, Visa Destination Insights, Near

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