

An aerial photograph of a two-lane road winding through a dense forest of green trees. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long rays of light that illuminate the scene. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

WEST
VIRGINIA™
TOURISM OFFICE

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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State of the Tourism Industry

§5B-2I-4(h)

The West Virginia Tourism Office shall submit a report annually to the Governor, Secretary of Commerce and the Legislature about the development of the tourism industry in the state and the necessary funding required by the state to continue the development of the tourism industry.

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Tourism is big business in West Virginia



\$4.6 BILLION
IN TRAVELER SPENDING



\$1.2 BILLION
IN EARNINGS



45,400
TOURISM-SUPPORTED JOBS



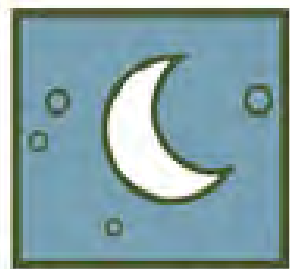
\$534.5 MILLION
IN STATE & LOCAL TAX REVENUE

Source: Dean Runyan Associates

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Tourism is big business in West Virginia



16.6 MILLION
OVERNIGHT TRIPS



49.8 MILLION
DAY TRIPS



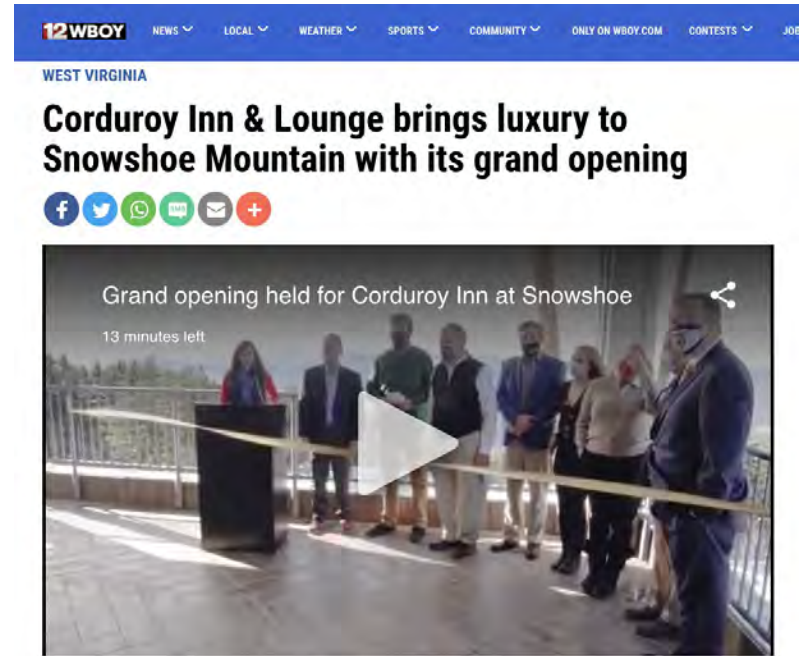
Source: Longwoods International

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Private investment is at an all-time high

Private investment from the Tourism Development Act Tax Credit in the last two years has surged to reflect **more than \$250 million** in new investment. This represents **more than double** the investment seen in the first 14 years of this program's existence.

Eight projects have indicated an intention to submit a TDA application in 2021; totaling more than **\$47 million** in investment.



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State Parks continue to reach new heights

Since Governor Justice took office, state parks have seen **\$100 million** in new investment for lodging improvements, facility upgrades and new activity offerings.

- Noteworthy projects include the creation of the Elk River Trail, a new lodge constructed at Cacapon Resort State Park and improvements at every park and forest in the state.

As state parks advertising has been integrated into the Tourism Office advertising, we've seen great results with revenue **increasing by 18.5%** over the past 2 years.

WEST VIRGINIA

state  parks

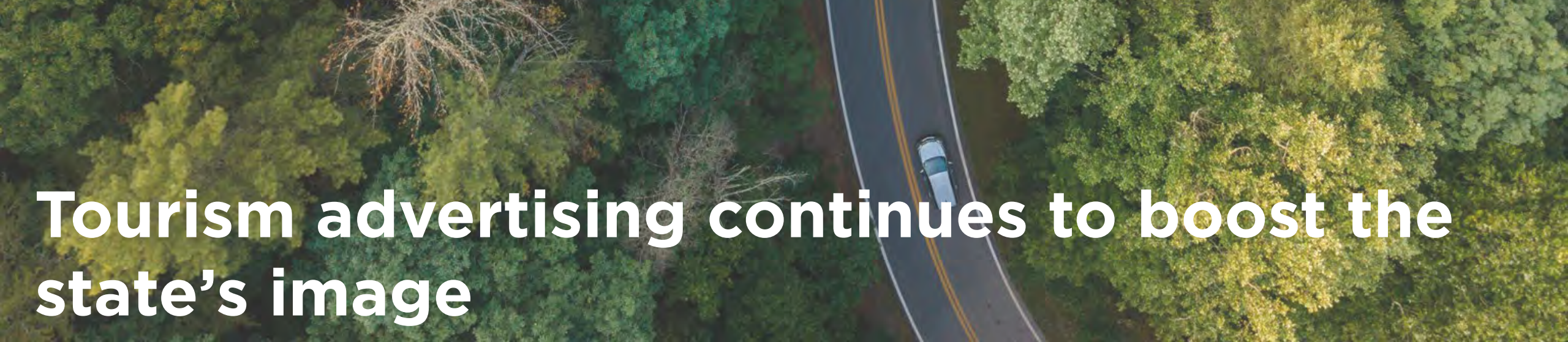
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The Almost Heaven brand continues to receive national awards

The first-ever flip cover vacation guide won an Eddie Award for **Best Custom Content Piece** in September 2020.

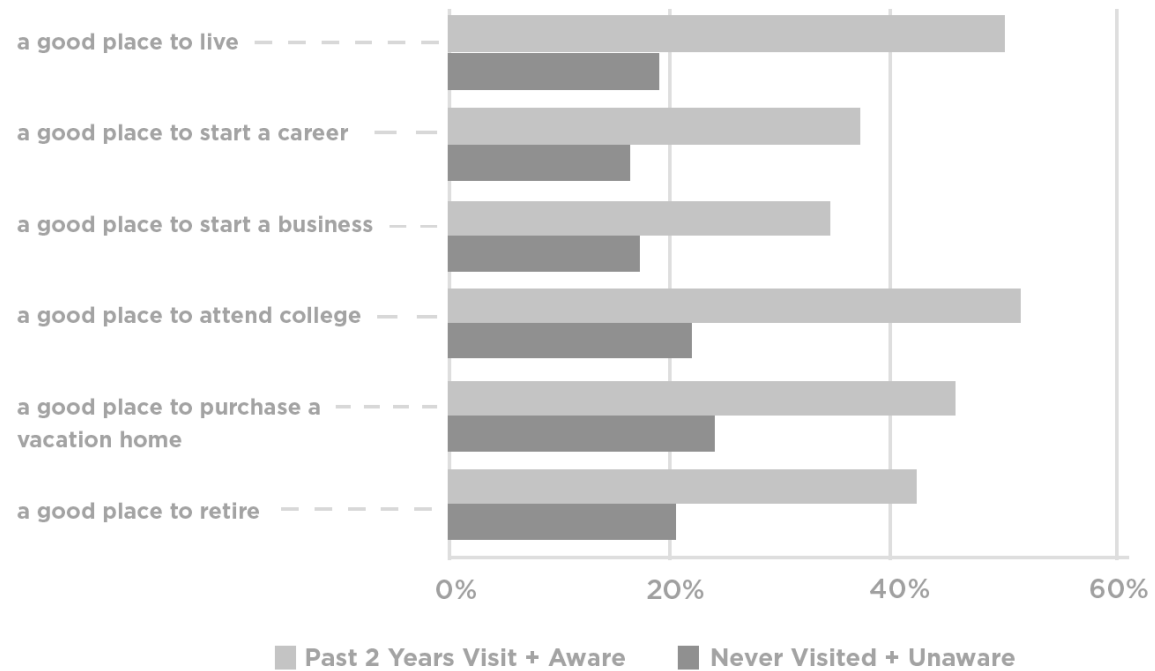


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Tourism advertising continues to boost the state's image

Research continues to show tourism advertising improves West Virginia's image as a place to live, start a business, go to college and retire.



Source: Longwoods International

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The Impact of COVID-19

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The Coronavirus devastated the tourism industry nationwide


In May, U.S. Travel Association CEO Roger Dow said **“38% of all the unemployed in the United States are from the travel industry. This is two times worse than the Great Depression was in the worst year for the travel industry.”**

News & Commentary / Press Release

Report: Coronavirus Having Catastrophic Impact on Travel Businesses and Workers

PRESS RELEASE | March 17, 2020

WASHINGTON – A new [analysis](#) released Tuesday by the U.S. Travel Association projects that decreased travel due to coronavirus will inflict an \$809 billion total hit on the U.S. economy and eliminate 4.6 million travel-related American jobs this year.

The dire impact numbers, prepared for the U.S. Travel Association by [Tourism Economics](#) , were presented by U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow at a Tuesday White House meeting with President Trump, Vice President Pence, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and other travel leaders.

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West Virginia's tourism industry was hit hard but is recovering

Like much of the country, initially, we saw declines in leisure and hospitality employment and hotel occupancy, but due to outdoor assets and creative marketing, we are reversing those trends.

Resident visitation record set in West Virginia state parks

By David Sibray, Editor - July 22, 2020

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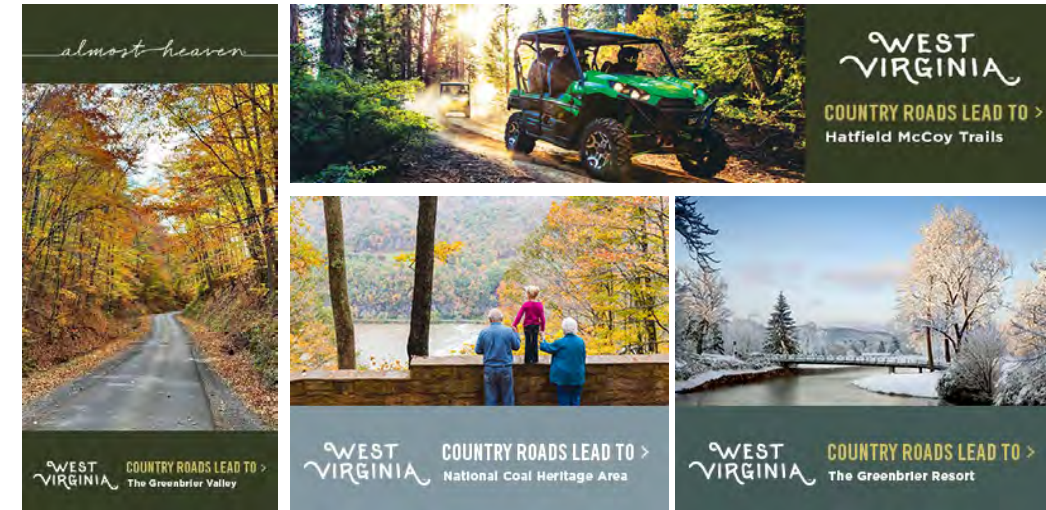
Cabins in state-managed parks in West Virginia are welcoming record in-state visitors. (Photo: W.Va. Dept. of Commerce)

State-managed parks and forests in West Virginia have welcomed a record-breaking number of in-state guests so far this year, thanks to a promotional discount available through August, Governor Jim Justice announced today.

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We are providing additional financial assistance to partners in need

In May, we turned off nearly all brand advertising and shifted our funds to assist partners through our cooperative advertising program. Traditionally, the program provides a 50% match on advertising but that has been temporarily **increased to 80%**.



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We are providing additional financial assistance to partners in need

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Tourism Office has provided partners with financial assistance to purchase nearly **\$2 million** in advertising to encourage travelers to continue dreaming about and planning travel to West Virginia.



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We continue to provide training and resources to partners

The Tourism Office has hosted **more than 20 industry trainings** to help partners navigate the pandemic. The trainings featuring some of the industry's leading experts are designed to share the latest travel research, marketing trends and practical advice on how to best adapt business practices to COVID-19 standards. Training attendance has averaged **more than 200 participates** per session.

Participating Brands

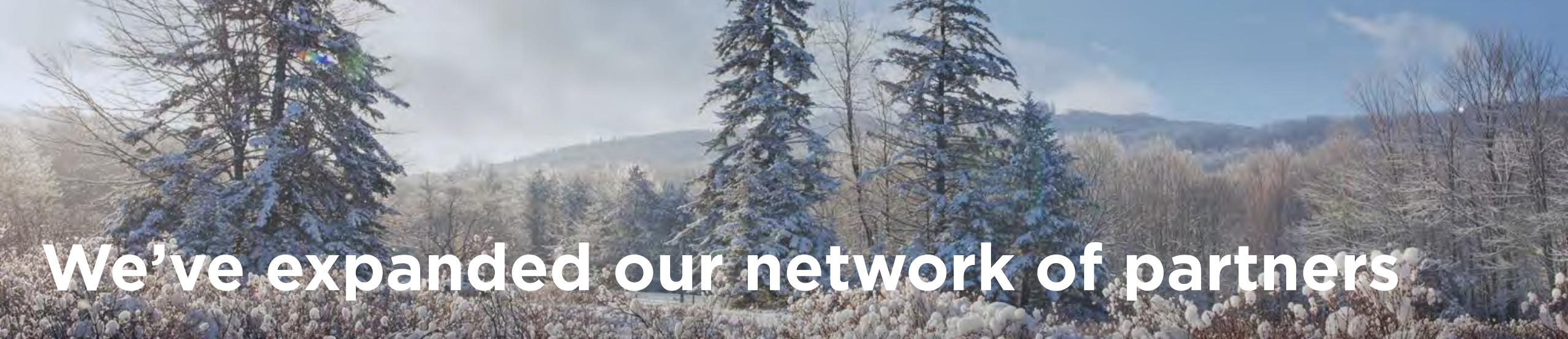
Longwoods
INTERNATIONAL

MADDEN
CONNECT PEOPLE TO PLACES

MARRIOTT

TRAVELZOO®

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We've expanded our network of partners

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we've begun working with more partners than ever before. Early in the pandemic, when uncertainty was at its greatest, we sent daily email updates to **nearly 650 industry partners**. This year, our subscriber list has **increased by 88%**.



INDUSTRY NEWS

As part of the new stimulus package signed by President Trump, the New River Gorge National River will now have a change in not only name but status. The New River Gorge National Park and Preserve will take its place as the nation's 63rd national park. Designated as a national river in 1978 and cared for by the National Park Service, the New River Gorge has been a prime outdoor destination known for rock-climbing, hiking and whitewater rafting in #AlmostHeaven.

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We have provided additional social media support

With so many tourism businesses in need, we were quick to launch a partner assistance program. The #PlaceIBelong social media campaign was launched in April with weekly toolkits and assist partners with maintaining a social media presence with reduced staff. **More than 125 partners** joined us with our *“When you’re ready, we’ll be ready”* messaging.



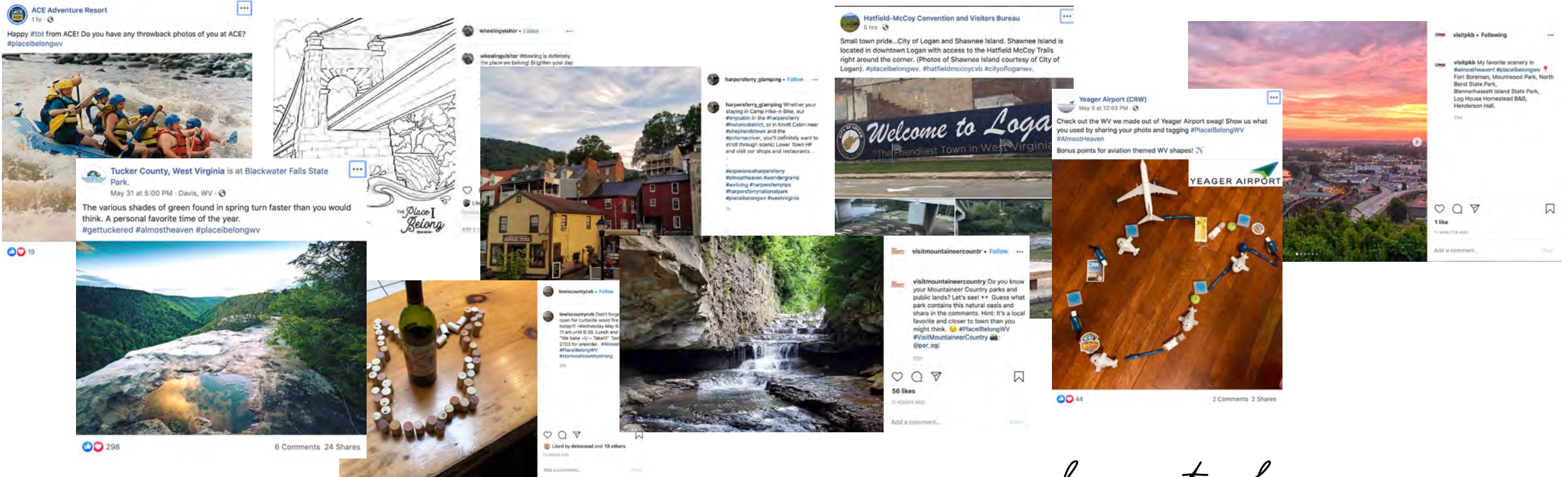
HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

Each area of West Virginia is just as unique as its residents, that's why we want all of our tourism partners to take the message of #PlaceIBelongWV and make it their own. While videos and quizzes will be initially shared by the @WVtourism social channels, we encourage you to make each post unique to your audience. Whether you want to keep things simple and share social posts from the Tourism Office, or tailor each message to fit your business and your audience, this social strategy can allow you to be as creative as you want.

Below are examples for the sixth week's prompts, we'll provide examples each week using different partners from around the state. These visual representations and sample copy are meant to inspire you, we encourage you to customize these with your hashtag or other messaging. These messages can be worked into your current social strategy or simply shared when it fits into your schedule. Through our united effort, we can help inspire travelers to start dreaming about their next trip to West Virginia when the time is right to travel again.

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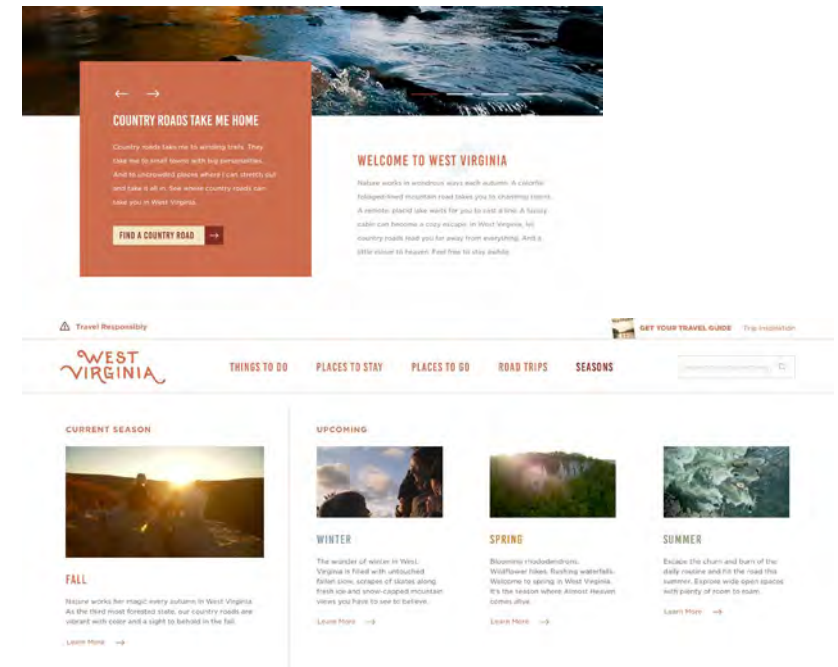
#PlaceIBelong Partner Campaign generated millions of impressions



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We launched a new website to better address post-COVID traveler preferences

Even though many of our paid ad campaigns were paused in 2020, organic website traffic soared. In 2020, we saw a **29% increase** with over **1.1 million visits**.



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West Virginia gave millions a place to fall in love with the outdoors

State and national parks saw record-breaking attendance. In 2020, West Virginia's state parks and forests welcomed more than **4.3 million** visitors—marking a **9% increase** in visitation year-over-year.



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The Future

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West Virginia has a tremendous opportunity to position itself as a post-COVID destination.



Small towns



Outdoor recreation



Road trips



Less crowded spots



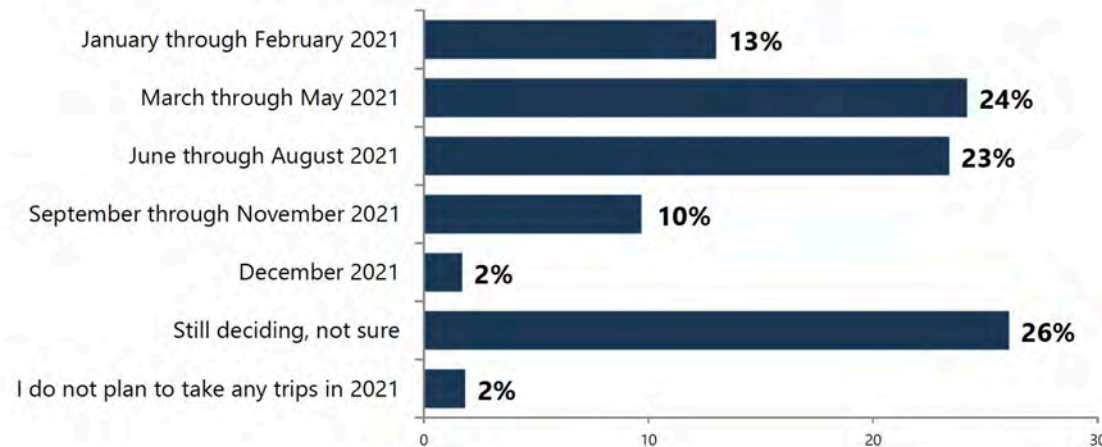
Affordable

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The vast majority of Americans are planning or dreaming of travel

IMPACT ON TRAVEL PLANS

When do you plan to take your first trip in 2021?



Source: Longwoods International, 2020

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Focus areas for 2021

- **New Tourism Office strategic plan to guide industry post-COVID-19**
- **Brand campaign focused on 50th anniversary of John Denver’s “Country Roads” to align with road trip trends**
- **Enhanced outdoor recreation development and promotion, with focus on new New River Gorge National Park & Preserve designation**
- **Cultural tourism programming for small businesses, chefs, artisans and musicians**
- **Identifying opportunities to continue leveraging the Almost Heaven brand and improve the state’s identity**
- **Develop new ways to extend the Almost Heaven campaign into one public-facing statewide brand**



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Necessary Funding to Continue Growth

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Level funding request for FY 2022

The Legislature appropriated an additional \$14 million in general revenue in FY21 to promote tourism in West Virginia. Maintaining level funding for FY22 will be critical to continued growth in the state's tourism industry as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

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Level funding request for FY 2022

Historical Funding Summary

Revenue Source	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Lottery	\$12,115,474	\$11,357,898	\$11,540,567	\$11,540,567
Surplus		\$2,500,000	\$7,000,000	
General			\$7,000,000	\$14,000,000
TOTAL	\$12,115,474	\$13,857,898	\$25,540,567	\$25,540,567

Appropriation	Total
Brand Promotion	\$10,000,000
Public Relations	\$1,500,000
Events and Sponsorships	\$500,000
Industry Development	\$500,000
State Parks & Recreation Advertising	\$1,500,000
TOTAL	\$14,000,000

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Bechtel Summit Revenue

In compliance with §11-3-9(h)(7)(A) and §11-3-9(h)(11), the Tourism Office has received three deposits into the Tourism Promotion Fund from revenue generated at the Bechtel Summit Reserve since 2015.

The funds will be used to assist with marketing of future events at the Bechtel Summit. The Tourism Office intends to use the revenue toward the 2021 sponsorship of the Spartan Race at the Bechtel Summit in West Virginia. Funds would have been used for the 2020 event; however, it was cancelled due to COVID-19. In the past 3 years, the event has attracted more than 40,000 annual attendees and generated a significant boost for the local economy.

Date	Amount
7/1/17 - 6/30/18	\$ 321.85
7/1/18 - 6/30/19	\$ 555.74
7/1/19 - 6/30/20	\$ 638.87
TOTAL	\$ 1,516.46

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A Look Back on Tourism Growth

<https://bit.ly/370xrMd>



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