



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

PREPARED BY
ELENA BLEVINS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Stakeholders,

As I reflect on the past year, I am immensely proud of what we, as a community and a tourism commission, have achieved together. Our efforts have positioned us as a dynamic destination that consistently attracts visitors, fosters economic growth, and enriches the lives of our residents. Thanks to your support, we have been able to make significant strides in our mission to drive tourism, elevate our local businesses, and continue building a vibrant and welcoming destination.

WHERE YOUR INVESTMENTS HAVE GONE

Your investment through transient room tax dollars has been essential in making all of this possible. In 2024, we strategically allocated funds towards projects that enhance the visitor experience, increase our visibility, and strengthen our local economy.

Key highlights include:

- **Fishing Tournament Sponsorships:** MLF Toyota Series, MLF Tackle Warehouse Invitational, MFL BFL series, National Fishing League Crappie Tournament, NTBA Bass Trail, Angler's Edge - USA Bassin' Series
- **Community Driven Sponsorships:** 400 Mile Garage Sale, Benton Rodeo, Aurora Chainsaw Carving Competition, Aurora's Jeep Jamboree, Kentucky Lake Chamber Hospitality, Kentucky Lake Sail Fest, Jackson Purchase Friends of Bluegrass, Calvert City River Folk Fest, and Calvert City Hot Air Ballon Glow, MC Anglers Bass Team
- **Multi-Faceted Marketing Campaigns:** Online and Digital campaigns, paid social media campaigns, print ads and materials, travel show and exhibitions, Kentucky state co-op advertising, local and regional advertising, website retargeting and extension; content creation and asset development

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025

As we move forward, we are excited to build on our accomplishments and introduce new initiatives that will drive sustainable growth and enhance our visitor experience. In 2025, we plan to further develop our digital presence with the addition of a marketing agency to help elevate our brand and messaging, welcome the USA Bassin' Championship Series back to Kentucky Lake this spring, along with the Bass Pro Tour in June and several other events in between! We also look forward to working closely with Calvert City and Churchill Downs to promote the new development of Marshall Yards! As always, we will continue supporting our local business community through strategic partnerships.

Our goal remains clear: to solidify our position as a must-visit destination, attracting visitors to spend their time and dollars within our growing and vibrant community that benefits our residents and businesses alike despite the unnerving status of the national travel economy and traveler sentiment. This upcoming year may pose a challenging season for us all, but we will weather the storm just as we always have and come out stronger for it.

Thank you for another great year and for your invaluable support in making this all possible. Together, we are not only showcasing the best of what our area has to offer but are also making a lasting impact on our community's economic vitality. Here's to another successful year ahead!

Elena Blevins

Elena Blevins
Executive Director





WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- Board of Directors & Staff Names
- Lodging - transient tax update
- Economic Impact Numbers
- Visitor Profile Research & Reports
- Legislative Priorities
- Kentucky Lake CVB Strategic Plan
- ARPA Project Summaries
- Looking Ahead for Fiscal Year 25/26

CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

- Kimberley Lightfoot - Chairperson - Lodging Owner - Short Term Rental
- Treston Smith - Vice Chair - Lodging Owner of Hickory Hill Resort
- Misty Grebner - Treasurer/Secretary - Lodging Owner of Moors Resort
- Tim Sasseen - At Large - Lodging Owner of Malcolm Creek Resort
- Jimila Cash Fulks - At Large - Attraction Owner of Maggie's Jungle Golf
- Joyce Dowdy - At Large - Restaurant Owner of Archer's
- Cindi Cook - At Large - Lodging Owner of Lakehouse Inn at Sledd Creek

STAFF MEMBERS:



Elena Blevins

Executive Director



Kim Quinn

Accountant



Megan Park

Marketing Assistant





OUR LODGING COMMUNITY:

The lodging community in Marshall County has become incredibly diverse. Currently on our website we list 15 locally owned resorts, plus 2 State Resort Parks, 14 hotel/motels, 88 Short Term Rentals, and 18 campgrounds. Please note that we estimate there are approximately 150 Short Term Rentals, however, not all of them have registered with our office. It is also likely that there are more campgrounds, however, we only want to include those campgrounds that offer short term transient sites.

Please take a moment to check our website, www.visitkylake.com to ensure your listing information is correct and if you notice any additional short term rentals or campgrounds that should be listed, please have them contact our office at 270-527-3128.

TRANSIENT ROOM TAX POLICY AND PROCEDURE

In 2022, the Kentucky State Legislature passed new legislation, which expanded the language on transient tax. The new language added nightly campsite rentals, RV parks, and third party booking platforms (VRBO, AirBnB, Evolve, etc.) as the responsible parties for collecting and remitting state and local transient tax. This new legislation went into effect January 1, 2023. In the last two years, we can attribute approximately \$100,000 in new transient tax revenue due to the expanded language, which requires short term rental platforms to collect and remit transient tax.

The process for collection and remittance has remained the same. Property owners are ultimately responsible for making sure their transient tax is collected and remitted to the County Treasurer's office on a monthly basis, whether they submit themselves or verify that their platform is doing it for them. AirBnb is still non-compliant with the new Kentucky State law and not collecting the local transient tax for Kentucky Counties. We encourage property owners to use the Evolve and VRBO platforms, as they are the most cooperative and compliant.

If you operate a short term rental business, you are also required to register with the tourism office and receive a transient tax account number. The form can be found on our industry partner page, or by visiting this link, <https://visitkylake.com/for-our-partners/>.

2024 ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM IN KENTUCKY



MARSHALL COUNTY

EMPLOYMENT 755 jobs

LABOR INCOME \$21.0 million

STATE AND LOCAL TAXES \$6.5 million

TOTAL ECONOMIC
IMPACT:

**\$90.4
Million**

TEAM
KENTUCKY®

New
Kentucky
Home

KENTUCKY

EMPLOYMENT **97,394 jobs**

LABOR INCOME **\$3.596 billion**

STATE & LOCAL TAXES **\$1.035 billion**

ECONOMIC IMPACT **\$14.3 billion**

2024 VISITOR PROFILE ANALYTICS:

• Executive Pulse Highlights

- 36.8% of all devices tracked were visitors.
- Visitors generated 17% of all local spending.
- 81% of accommodation and 42% of attraction spending came from visitors.
- 51% of total visitor spend went directly to local businesses.
- Top markets: Evansville, Paducah, Nashville, St. Louis, Louisville.
- Visitor demographics: 54% aged 25-54; 39% earn \$100k+; 38% have children.

• Strategic Planning Insights

- Visitor-to-Resident ratio peaked in Summer 2024 (0.65 in July).
- Highest Quality Visit markets: Birmingham AL, Huntsville AL, Atlanta GA.
- Top accommodation visitor origins: Chicago, St. Louis, Evansville.
- Website content most engaged with: Outdoor Recreation, Navigation/Home, Events.
- Main activities: Accommodations, Sports, Food.

• Visitor Snapshot Highlights

- 78.4% of all visitors were from out-of-state.
- Visitor spend was led by: Food & Beverage (29.7%), Arts & Entertainment (28.8%), Gas (28%).
- High average spends: Arts & Entertainment (\$1,167), Accommodations (\$244).
- Top spending markets: Nashville, St. Louis, Chicago.
- Visitation concentrated in tourism and retail regions.

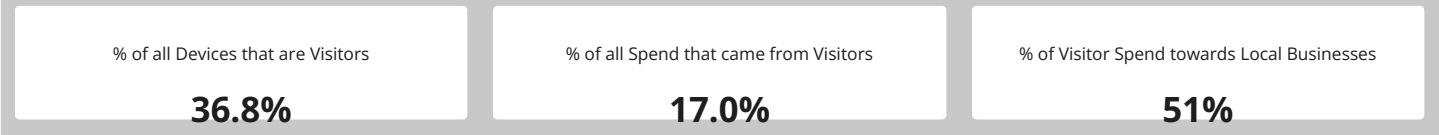
• Website Engagement Metrics

- Sessions up 15% (149,744 total); New users up 18%.
- Slight decline in engagement rate (44.6%) and session duration (1:22).
- Top content: Navigation/Home (64.9%), Outdoor Recreation (24.9%), Events (5.8%).
- Summer and Spring are peak seasons for site traffic.
- High-traffic but low-SEO pages: Boating, Family Fun, Restaurants.



How do visitors impact your economy?

Source: Zartico Spend Data



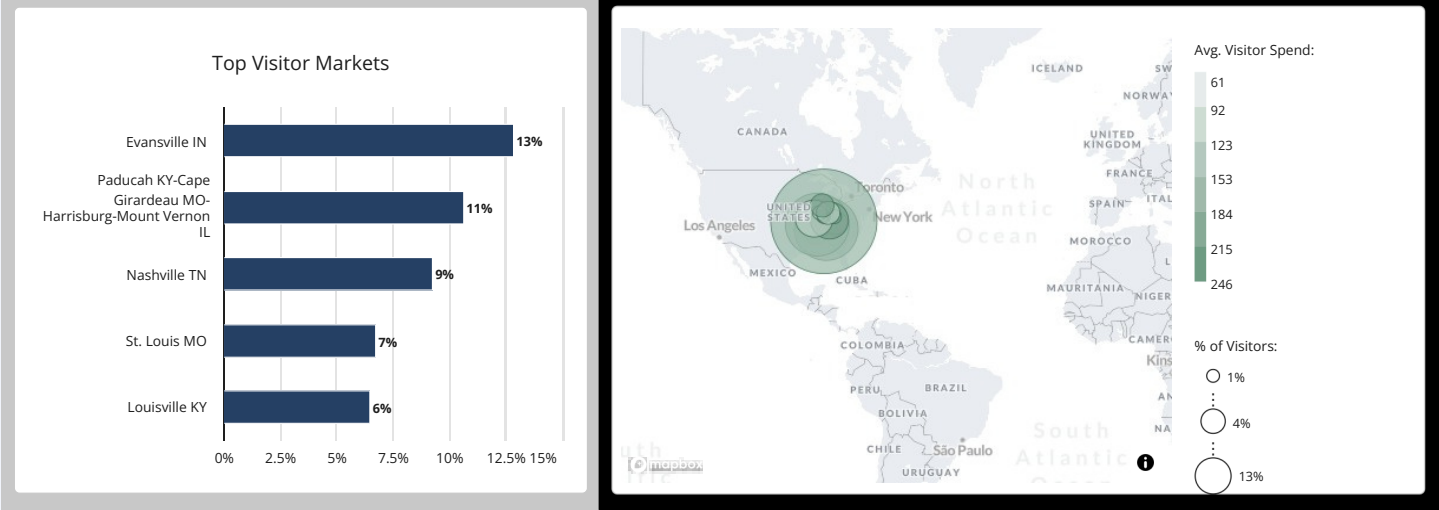
How much are visitors contributing to your economy?

Source: Zartico Spend Data



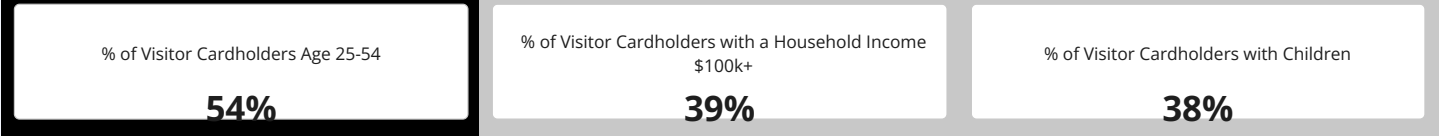
Where are your visitors coming from?

Source: Zartico Geolocation Data



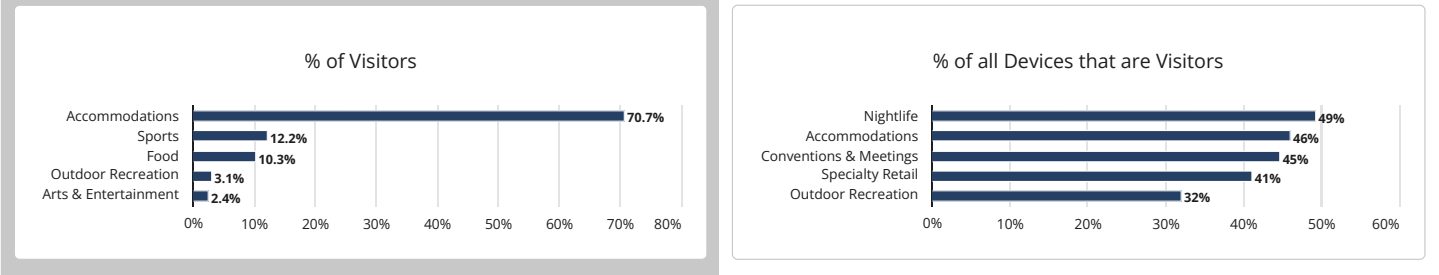
What are your visitor demographics?

Source: Zartico Spend Data



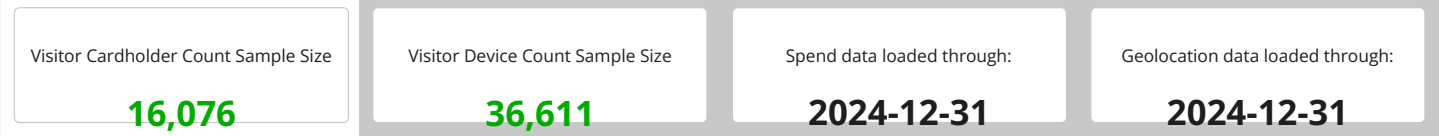
Where do visitors go in-destination? Where do they make the greatest impact?

Source: Zartico Location Data



Sample Size Reference

These metrics provide a reference for the number of unique visitor devices (Zartico Geolocation Data) and cardholders (Zartico Spend Data) used in the insights above and are controlled by the filters selected at the top. If these show yellow or red values, the insights should be treated as directional but less precise, owing to a smaller sample size. In these cases, expanding your filter criteria at the top will increase the sample size.





2024 - 2025 Sponsorships and Events

- 2024 400 Mile Yard Sale
- 2024 BFL events (4 total)
- 2024 MLF Toyota Series
- 2024 MLF Tackle Warehouse invitational
- 2024 NTBA Spring Classic
- 2024 USA Bassin Jackson Kayak Series
- 2024 USA Bassin Fall Directors & Seniors Classic
- 2024 Jeep Jamboree @ Kenlake
- 2024 Kentucky Lake Sailfest Regatta
- 2024 Calvert City Riverfolk Fest
- 2024 MC Hoopfest Basketball Tournament
- 2024 Calvert City Hot Air Balloon Glow
- 2024 MCHS Bass Fishing team
- 2024 MSU Bass Fishing team
- 2025 Jet-A-Marina Tournament Series
- 2025 MLF College and HS Fishing (Massive turn out!)
- 2025 MLF Toyota Series
- 2025 USA Bassin Championship week (2 year contract)
- 2025 Bass Pro Tour Event (June 5-8)

2024 Travel Show Schedule

- Kentucky State Fair
- Let's Go Fishing - Collinsville IL
- Louisville Boat & RV Show
- Indianapolis Boat & RV Show



ARPA DMO - Marshall Projects

Thanks to the Kentucky State Legislature & Governor Beshear, the tourism industry received state and federal funding to help our industry bounce back after the COVID pandemic. These are some of the projects our office was able to support through this limited funding.



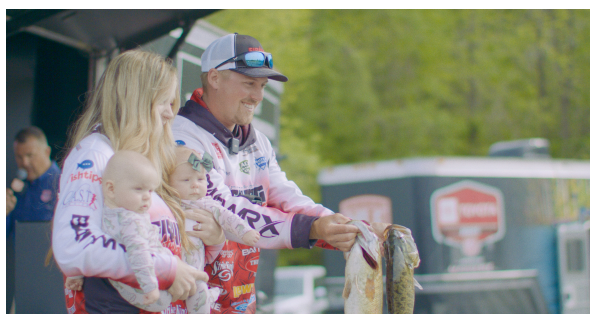
2024 AGLOW CONFERENCE

In September 2024, we hosted the annual AGLOW conference. This conference brings together both outdoor sportsman, enthusiasts, writers, videographers, podcasters, photographers, and other media members for a week to experience our destination and to write about the time and experiences.



DIGITAL BILLBOARDS & IHEART RADIO CAMPAIGNS

We ran a digital billboard campaign for several months, promoting the lake in the Southern Illinois and Southeast Missouri markets. We also were able to run two different radio campaigns on iHeart Radio promoting the lake and our outdoor recreation opportunities.



MLF'S TACKLE WAREHOUSE INVITATIONAL

We were able to sponsor two major events with Major League, the Toyota Series shortly followed by the Tackle Warehouse Invitational, which was a massive success. At the time, it was their most streamed event to date and the amount positive PR we received from the event was exactly what was needed to showcase the return of our fishery..



MAYDAY MUSIC MASHUP

This two day music festival took place actually in May of 2023 of Memorial Day weekend. It happened at Kenlake State Park at the amphitheater. Due to low turn out and limited funding, we were unable to continue this event the following year.



CONTENT PARTNERSHIPS

We were able to use the funding to partner with content influencers like Jason Sealock to add a significant amount of content on our website to better inform our visitors about our fishery, when to fish, what to fish, how to fish successfully, etc.,

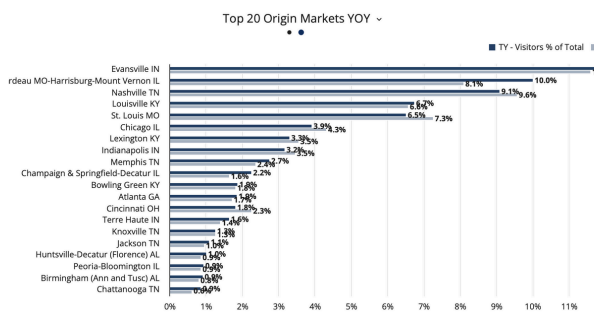


VIDEO AND PHOTOGRAPHY SHOOTS

We also were able to use the funding for content creation and asset development in the form of video and photography shoots for better imagery and expressions of our brand.

VISITOR PROFILE RESEARCH

Another portion of the funding went towards research which allows to better monitor where our visitors are coming from, when, as well as how they move throughout our destination while they are here. It has provided us with key intel to help identify areas of opportunity for our website and tourism infrastructure.



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Some of the funding helped support a 5 year strategic plan for the city of Benton for downtown revitalization. The tourism industry would love to have more land-based entertainment options for visitors to experience and this was a way to offer some assistance and guidance..





WEST KENTUCKY BBQ BELT

This marketing campaign was geared towards highlighting our regional BBQ restaurants through billboard, visual, digital, and influencer marketing. This project was a Traverse award recipient.



WEST KENTUCKY WINE TRAIL

This marketing campaign featured 9 wineries across 6 different counties in West KY. Our local wineries, Poca Terra and Buckhorn Creek Vineyard were included. This campaign included a new website and social channels, passports, wine glasses, traditional and digital media and was even featured on a radio show. Also a Traverse award recipient.



WEST KENTUCKY BREW HOP

The West KY Brewery Hop has been around for a little while, but we used the ARPA funding for additional marketing effort.



WEST KENTUCKY DISC GOLF TRAIL

We launched a disc golf trail in West KY to help encourage growth in the sport. A tournament series took place at a course in each participating county. The tournament in Marshall maxed out at 94 participants from several states.



KENTUCKY HORSEPOWER CAMPAIGN

The Kentucky Horsepower project was Elena Blevins concept and the largest multi-jurisdictional project in the Commonwealth with 24 partners. It was a digital marketing campaign focused on what Kentucky Horsepower looks like on water, on the track, and on the road.

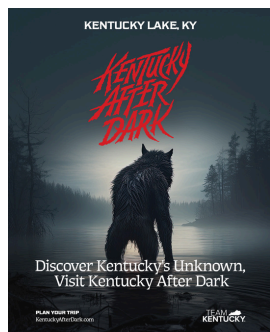
KENTUCKY SPORTS ALLIANCE

The Kentucky Sports Alliance, formerly known as Team Kentucky, used their ARPA funding to go through an entire rebrand program which is now much more competitive in marketing to the sports tourism market for it's members, which the Kentucky Lake CVB is a member.



KENTUCKY AFTER DARK CAMPAIGN

The Kentucky After Dark campaign was by far the most successful multi-jurisdictional campaign we were a part of. It received national recognition and over a million dollars in earned media value. This campaign focused on the folk lore and paranormal in Kentucky and we focused the legend of the Beast of LBL - The Dogman.



JUST ADD WATER CAMPAIGN

The Just Add Water campaign was a marketing campaign that focused on water-based recreational activities across different destinations in Kentucky. My favorite video commercial came from this project though and we are continuing to utilize it into the new fiscal year.





LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Every legislative session, the Kentucky travel industry puts together a list of priorities that might either positively or negatively impact our industry as a whole. These priorities generally include the following:

- Protect our funding mechanism both at the state and local levels.
- Encourage bills that make us a welcoming state.
- Encourage bills that allow for tourism development and growth, especially within the bourbon industry.
- Strongly oppose any bills that would allow Airbnb to continue to remain non-compliant with Kentucky State law.
- For our lake destinations specifically like ours, oppose any bills that would tax or impose a fee for the usage of Kentucky waterways.
- Encourage the expansion of the restaurant tax to all cities across the Commonwealth for added funding mechanisms for the growth of the tourism industry across the Commonwealth.

KENTUCKY LAKE CVB STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW:

The Kentucky Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau's strategic plan focuses on strengthening tourism infrastructure, expanding visitor experiences, and enhancing marketing efforts to drive sustainable growth over the next decade. Priorities include renovating lodging and encouraging the development of luxury accommodations by advocating for the expansion of the Tourism Development Act, improving visitor mobility through shuttle and rideshare services, and recruiting a major anchor tourism project through public-private partnerships. The plan also emphasizes diversifying year-round offerings by expanding land-based activities like trails and agri-tourism, supporting spring and fall events, and enhancing shopping, dining, and entertainment options in collaboration with local businesses.

To boost visibility and visitor engagement, the CVB will launch targeted digital marketing campaigns, create travel packages, and partner with influencers and ambassadors. Community engagement plays a key role, with plans to educate residents on the value of tourism, develop hospitality workforce training programs, and support local entrepreneurs with grants and incentives. The plan also calls for advocacy around implementing a restaurant tax in Benton and Calvert City, pursuing state and grant funding, and strengthening legislative lobbying efforts. Overall, these strategies aim to position Marshall County as a premier outdoor recreation destination and generate long-term economic impact. The full document is attached at the end of this report, or you can access the plan online by visiting our industry partner page on our website, visitkylake.com.



CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Strategic Plan for the Kentucky Lake CVB

Marshall County's tourism industry is a critical economic driver, bringing outside dollars into the community through visitation and overnight stays. As we look ahead to the next ten years, it is essential to continue to leverage Kentucky Lake, our greatest asset, while addressing key challenges and capitalizing on emerging opportunities.

Our goal is to develop sustainable tourism strategies that increase economic impact, enhance visitor experiences, and position our destination as a premier outdoor recreation hub.

Key Focus Areas & Actionable Goals

1. Strengthening Our Tourism Infrastructure

- **Lodging Improvements:** Work with property owners and investors to encourage the renovation and modernization of outdated lodging facilities. Advocate for the development of modernized and/or luxury lodging options to attract a higher-spending demographic. **Conference & Event Space:** Explore opportunities to develop conference amenities, meeting spaces, and/or entertainment multi-use facilities to attract business and group travel, and sports tourism, especially in the shoulder seasons. **Transportation Solutions:** Develop and/or recruit shuttle services or ride-sharing partnerships to improve mobility for visitors and
- enhance access to key attractions. Identify our next “anchor” tourism development project.
- Work with our Economic Development partner to attract and recruit public-private partnerships for the construction and development of an a multi-use or entertainment venue.



CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

2. Expanding Visitor Experiences

- Year-Round Activities: Leverage current and look into developing new land-based activities such as hiking/biking trails, cultural and heritage attractions, agri-tourism experiences, sports and adventure tourism options to complement the lake. Shoulder Season Events: Continue to leverage to rising tide of our fishery by
- sponsoring fishing tournaments. However, we could also look at attracting outdoor festivals, and themed events in the spring and fall to drive visitation beyond peak summer months. Retail & Entertainment Development: Work with our Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to enhance shopping, dining, and entertainment
- options that appeal to tourists and provide additional attractions beyond lake activities.

3. Marketing & Branding Enhancement

- Targeted Campaigns: Leverage digital marketing, social media, and strategic advertising in surrounding states and rising markets to attract visitors within a 4-6 hour drive radius or competing lake/ fishery destinations. Storytelling &
- Positioning: Highlight Marshall County's affordability, family-friendly environment, and outdoor recreation through compelling storytelling. Influencer &
- Ambassador Programs: Partner with outdoor influencers, travel bloggers, and regional ambassadors to showcase the unique experiences our destination offers. Create "packages" with discounted lodging, dining, and experiences to promote to
- our visitors for ease of planning. A pay to play concept for specific and participating businesses. Create a local Ambassador program in which serve as a welcoming committee, volunteer pool, and brand advocates for the CVB to help
- with events, projects, and advocacy of our local tourism industry needs.



CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

4. Community Engagement & Workforce Development

- Public Awareness Campaigns: Educate the local community on the value of tourism and how it benefits the local economy to reduce resistance to change and negative visitor sentiment. Workforce Initiatives: Collaborate with local schools, colleges, and businesses to create training programs that prepare residents for careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. Business Incentives: Encourage local entrepreneurs to develop tourism-related businesses by providing grant opportunities and startup support.

5. Funding & Policy Advocacy

- Restaurant Tax Implementation: Educate local leadership and the general public on the benefits of a restaurant tax. Advocate for the introduction of a restaurant tax in both Benton and Calvert City to generate additional funding for tourism initiatives and infrastructure improvements for the respective cities. Public-Private Partnerships: Work with KLED, investors, developers, and community leaders to fund and execute major tourism and “anchor” projects. Grant & State Funding Opportunities: Pursue grants and state-level funding for tourism development projects, infrastructure improvements, and workforce training programs. Significantly grow our collective voice at the state level within our legislature and representatives to better lobby for our needs and interests. Advocate for short term rental compliance at the state and local level through education and coordination with the MC Treasurer’s office.

In conclusion, by implementing these strategic actions, Marshall County and the Kentucky Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau can strengthen its position as a premier outdoor and lake recreation and fishing destination. Through targeted investment, infrastructure development, community engagement, and marketing efforts, we will drive sustainable tourism growth, enhance visitor experiences, and generate long-term economic benefits for our local communities.



Looking Ahead to FY 2025 - 2026

As we move through the second half of the year, I want to acknowledge the growing uncertainty surrounding the travel economy. Across the country, destinations are seeing shifts in consumer behavior—shorter booking windows, cautious spending, and a stronger emphasis on value. While Marshall County and the Kentucky Lake area remain competitive, we are not immune to these broader trends.

Here at the Kentucky Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau, we continue to monitor travel sentiment, tourism forecasts, and economic indicators. We've seen early signs of softening in some markets, while others remain stable. It's clear that travelers are still prioritizing getaways, but they are being more selective, looking for destinations that offer affordability, authenticity, and memorable experiences.

Amidst these changes, we are proud to celebrate major wins—most notably the excitement of the Bass Pro Tour to Kentucky Lake. Hosting this nationally televised event is not only a testament to the strength of our community and infrastructure, but a sign of confidence in the resurgence of our legendary fishery. After several challenging seasons, our waters are once again attracting anglers, tournaments, and fans from across the country.

This momentum is critical. As the leisure travel market remains uncertain, we are hopeful that fishing-related tourism—one of our region's most reliable and resilient sectors—will continue to carry us forward. With strong partnerships, targeted marketing, and continued focus on enhancing the visitor experience, we believe this staple market can help buffer against fluctuations in discretionary travel.

That's where our collaboration with you becomes even more important. We're committed to supporting our local tourism industry by being strategic in marketing efforts and sponsorship opportunities, and would like to work with you to attract guests who value what our destination has to offer. As we move into the new fiscal year, we are hoping to offer some sessions on digital marketing, social media, and the Tourism Development Act as a way to help grow our presence online for all of us.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with your thoughts, challenges, or ideas. Together, we can adapt, grow, and ensure Kentucky Lake remains a strong, sustainable destination year-round.

