



## 2023 TOURISM REVIEW

The Tourism Board is responsible for developing and implementing a plan to market and promote tourism for Custer County. Tourism is supported by a 2% lodging tax paid for by visitors staying in local accommodations including short-term rentals.

As per our Bylaws: *“The revenues generated by the lodging tax shall be used only to promote, advertise and market tourism in Custer County, via a mix of traditional and media advertising, as determined by the CCTB. No lodging tax collected shall be used for any capital expenditures, with the exception of tourist information centers.”*

Lodging tax revenue for 2023 totaled \$104,690.12, a growth of 32.8% from 2022 and 129% over budget. This lodging tax figure translates to \$5.2 million in lodging revenue. Without a doubt, Tourism is a vital economic driver. We will begin the new year with \$111,456.00 in the bank and will operate within a budget of \$83,000 in 2024.

### Tourism Review of 2023:

- Held a **Tourism Discussion Forum** in the library community room filled to capacity to toss around ideas. We will plan an annual community outreach to keep people informed about tourism and engage people to help support businesses and build community.
- A **Strategic Planning Session** is scheduled for Tuesday, February 13 with Gary Taylor as facilitator. We will then update **2024-2026 Marketing Plan**. We Care for Colorado.
- The **Destination Stewardship Initiative** is a strategic industry framework that takes a collaborative approach to support our state balance the quality of life for residents alongside the experience for visitors while enhancing our natural environment, cultures and communities. The concept emphasizes the need to balance tourism development with the preservation of the destination’s natural, cultural and social resources. Seven categories with nine priorities; top three shown:
  - Community Impacts: Workforce housing availability and affordability. Maintaining community character. Investments that benefit visitors and residents
  - Cultural Heritage: Enhancing festivals and events. Preservation of historical buildings and homes. Honoring Native Americans and their lands.
  - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility: Encouraging & recognizing inclusive hosts. Accessible infrastructure. Accessible interpretation & information.
  - Economic Sustainability: Addressing seasonality (positive/negative impacts). Advancing tourism workforce. Increasing livable wages and perks for workforce.
  - Environment: Preventing wildfires. Minimizing noise, light and contamination pollution. Addressing water usage, conservation and quality.
  - Visitor Management: Waste management (i.e. littering and pet waste). Improving visitor behavior / promotion of Leave No Trace principles. Maintaining the welcome (i.e. making sure that residents are friendly to visitors).
  - Governance: Over-dependence on volunteers (boards/councils/committees) for complex, long-term programs/projects (e.g. byways). Limited public understanding about tourism,



management/marketing functions, funding and revenue use. Lack of coordination for data collection, monitoring and reporting.

- Two paid **social media campaigns**, one for awareness and for an off-season Getaway Giveaway. Close to 3,000 entries for 2 prize packages for travel between now and April 15.
- Applying for a **CTO Management Grant** for \$20,000 with a \$5,000 match to replace three Forest Service trailhead kiosks and update all kiosks with interpretive signage on the Rainbow Trail. We are working in collaboration with the Forest Service, Trails for All, Custer County Search & Rescue and All the Range.
- Shelly Larson of **Jo Studio, Inc.** is a yearly contract and just as we thought, her talent and professionalism has elevated Tourism's ability to market and promote the Wet Mountain Valley with creativity, expertise and enthusiasm. Tourism provides graphic design and printing of event posters and literature for non-profits.
- A yearly contract with **Vista Works** to maintain and support our website along with Content Update Plan.
- Attended the **Governor's Tourism Conference** in Fort Collins in September. The event was very informative and we visited local and state Welcome Centers.
- **CC Tourism literature** (all available as a download online as well as in print):
  - WMV Guidebook, will be reprinted in 2024. Less than 3000 left.
  - Town Map will be updated/reprinted in May before Memorial weekend.
  - Hiking map of the Sangre de Cristo and Wet Mountains, plenty of 50 pg. pads.
  - Past & Present booklet released in May. Printed 10,000 copies, less than 3000 left.
  - The Restaurant Schedule is updated on a monthly basis.
- **Press in 2023:**
  - Headlines: The Charming Town of Westcliffe is Picture-Perfect for a Weekend Getaway. Top Summer Stargazing Destinations. These Towns were Named the nation's top stargazing spots. 9 gorgeous Rocky Mountain Towns to visit in 2023. How You Can Experience Ranch Life in Colorado in 303 Magazine. Trips with loved ones for any season. 9 of the most welcoming towns in the Rockies. 12 Unforgettable Small Towns to Visit in the Rockies in World Atlas.
  - The town of Westcliffe is included in the deck of the Colorado Adventure Bucket List of 50 adventures for every season around the state.



- **Welcome Center located at 107 N 3rd St.**
  - Open mid-March to early November. Want to be open more with volunteers to staff a five hour shift once a month on a Wed, Thur, Fri, Sat & holiday Sundays.
  - Will paint a fresh mural on patio wall by a local artist.
  - Will purchase a monitor to place in window to display a slide show of events and places of business to have information available even when closed. Will also purchase an iPad for easy access to the internet to share with visitors.
- Seeking board members to add to current five. Meetings are second Tuesday of month 9-11am. We are going to have winter Zoom meetings. Anyone can zoom in by sending an email to to get zoom link.
- **Marketing and Promotion in 2024 will include:**
  - a half page ad and advertorial in *Royal Gorge 2024 Official Visitors Guide*
  - a three issue ad campaign in *Colorado Life* including a full page ad in May/June
  - Colorado Vacation Directory online listing
  - small print and online ad in *CTO Official Visitors Guide*
  - participation in CTO Welcome Leads program for six months
  - monthly e-mail newsletter (bi-monthly in July, Aug, Sept), close to 10,000 subscribers
  - Social media cadence on Facebook and Instagram for posts both organic and paid
  - KLZR Underwriting radio spots for local tourism messages
- **Tourism Future Projects:**
  - Main Street Banner Campaign
  - Directional Display Kiosks—way-finding in town
  - Community based analysis (data collection) with professional support to drive decisions that create measurable results to support the needs of tourism.
- **Ideas to Implement:**
  - Main Street Trolley
  - Colorado Creative District
  - Gravel riding event
  - Parade of Cows Art Installation
  - Winter Triathlon
  - Living History Event
  - Pickle Ball / Ping Pong Tournament
  - Chuckwagon
  - BBQ Festival / Chili Cook-Off