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DRIVE 2.0

2020-2025 STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN
REGIONAL PLAN: **VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS**



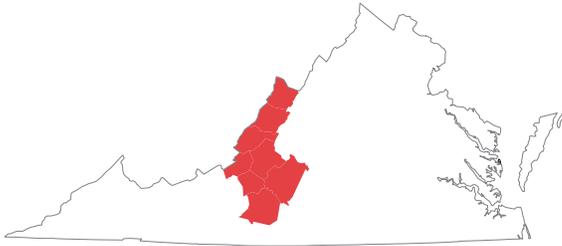
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VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Mountains regional plan builds upon the foundational insights established in the 2020-2025 statewide tourism plan. Developed for every locality within the region to use, this plan provides insights and recommendations on where to focus product development and promotional efforts over the next five years. The plan aims to help spur the growth and impact of travel and tourism for every locality in the Virginia Mountains region by increasing tourism products, expenditures, employment and local and state tax receipts.

Plan note: Virginia Mountains was established as a region after the original DRIVE Tourism plan in 2013. Localities in this region were previously included in the Central Virginia, Shenandoah Valley, and Blue Ridge Highlands regions. The total number of tourism regions went from nine in 2013 to 10 regions today.

**All DRIVE 2.0 research was conducted in 2019 and compiled pre COVID-19 Crisis.
Please see vatc.org/coronavirus for COVID-19: Industry Response Toolkit.**



The Virginia Mountains region consists of the municipalities of Roanoke, Salem, Hot Springs, Vinton, Bedford, Covington, Rocky Mount, Clifton Forge, Buchanan, Warm Springs, Troutville, Fincastle, and New Castle as well as the counties of Roanoke, Bedford, Franklin, Botetourt, Alleghany, Craig, Bath, and Highland.

QUICK FACTS

- Population: 442,487 (5th largest of the 10 VA regions)
- Largest town/city: Roanoke (99,920)
- Interstates: I-81, I-64
- US-11, US-460, US-220
- Border states: WV
- Commercial airports: Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport
- Proximity to urban hubs: Charlottesville, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Charlotte, and Charleston

TOURISM IMPACT

The Virginia Mountains region accounted for nearly \$1.4 billion in travel and tourism expenditures in 2018 (approximately 5% of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures). Year over year, the region experienced a 4.8% increase in expenditures (just ahead of the overall Virginia state expenditure growth of 4.4%).

- **Total expenditures:** \$1.4 billion
- **Employment:** 11,752
- **Payroll:** \$259 million
- **Local tax receipts:** \$38 million
- **State tax receipts:** \$52 million

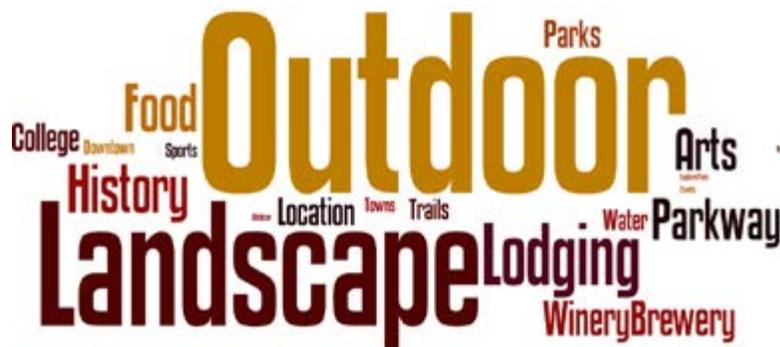
From a tourism industry perspective, Virginia Mountains was first designated as a separate region by industry stakeholders as of January 1, 2016. In addition to tourism marketing at the destination level, Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge is a regional tourism partnership serving the counties of Botetourt, Franklin, and Roanoke, as well as the cities of Roanoke and Salem. Similarly, Virginia's Western Highlands is also a regional tourism marketing partnership serving the counties of Alleghany, Bath, Craig, Highland and the city of Covington.



LURES

The Virginia Mountains' natural and outdoor recreational opportunities continue to be strengths for the region, offering visitors scenic and relaxing getaways, as well as opportunities to hike, bike, horseback ride, observe wildlife, hunt, fish, kayak, canoe, and camp.

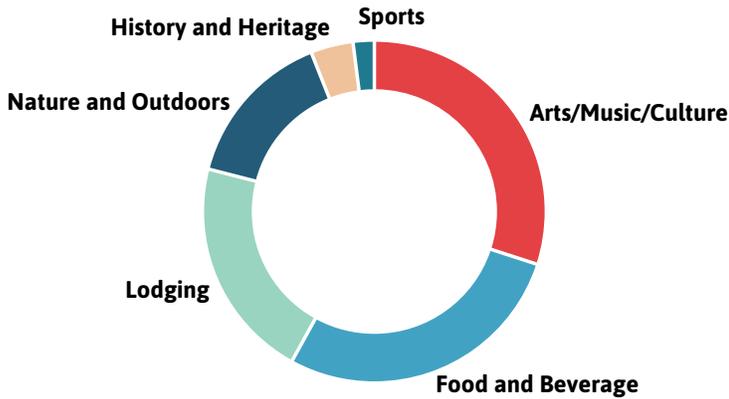
When asked to name a the primary lure for the region, industry leaders identify the following:



With its mountainous landscape, waterways, forests, and other natural features, outdoor recreation opportunities remain key strengths, and well-known experiences such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Appalachian Trail run through the region. Other trails include US Bicycle Route 76, and the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. The region is also home to a variety of signature outdoor sports events, including the Blue Ridge Marathon, GoOutside Festival, a free event that allows people to try out gear, witness demonstrations, and check out music and outdoor recreational events, and the Blue Ridge GO Cross Race, which kicks off the UCI international cyclocross and USA Cycling's ProCX racing calendars in North America. The Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3, Virginia's Blue Ridge triathlon, and Virginia's Blue Ridge Gran Fondo are also great draws to the area.

Inventory of Regional Assets

Source: VTC Research

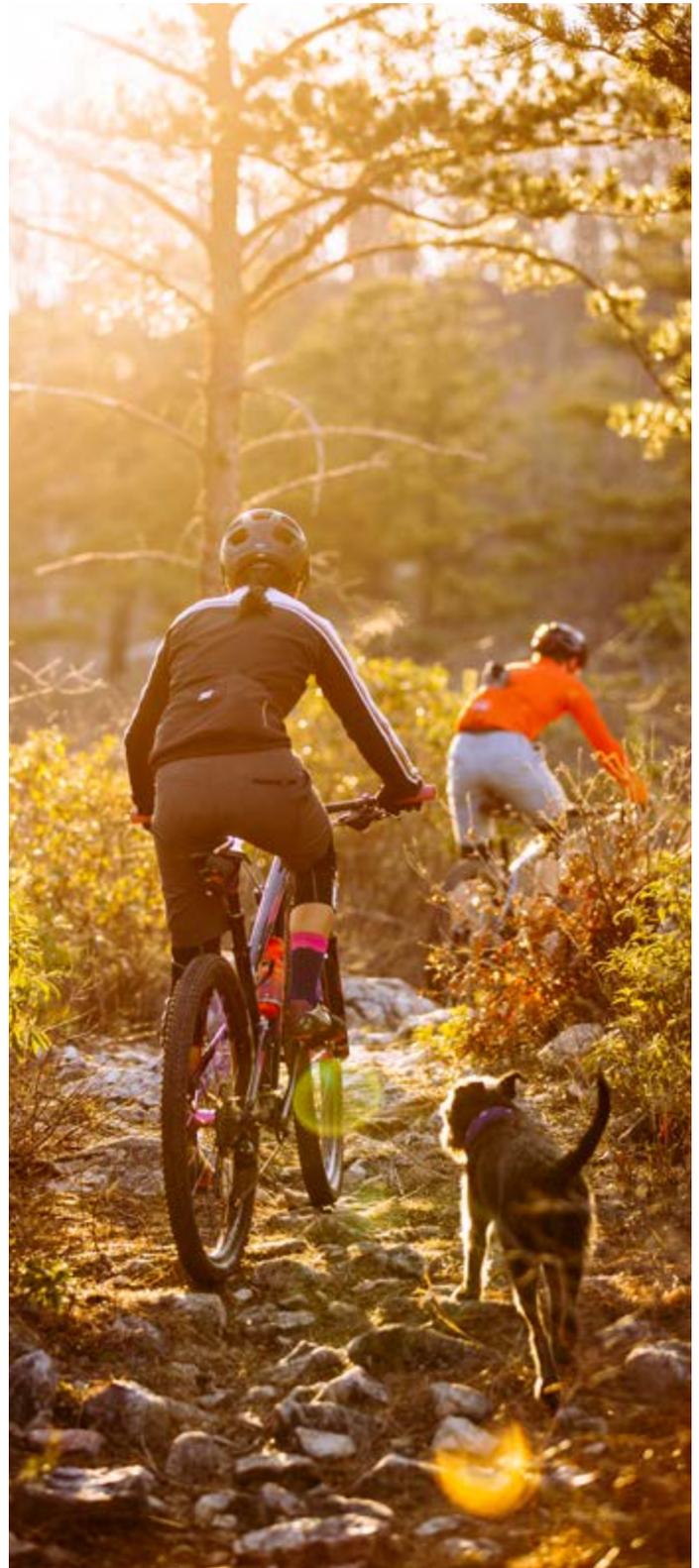


LURES (cont'd)

In conjunction with these trails and events, there are also numerous opportunities to hike, bike, horseback ride, observe wildlife, rock climb, hunt, fish, kayak, canoe, camp, and ski through a variety of other assets such as the George Washington & Jefferson Forests, and two state parks. The Jackson River Blueway and the Jackson River Scenic Trail allow outdoor lovers to kayak, tube, or bike in the Alleghany Highlands. The newly opened Alleghany Outdoors in Covington rents kayaks, tubes, bikes and rafts.

Virginia’s Western Highlands offers one of the healthiest and most biologically diverse forest in the world. National forest land features sightings of wildlife, such as black bears, bobcats, brook trout, and songbirds, as well as rare and unusual plants. Trails throughout the Alleghany Highlands and the counties of Bath, Craig, and Highland offer insights to the region’s rich heritage, gorgeous landscapes, and friendly communities.

The mountain hamlet of Paint Bank offers opportunities to hunt and fish, and visitors can also explore the fish hatchery and learn about the trout rearing and stocking processes, with 1.6 million trout in all stages of development. In the highest elevations of the region, you will also find a sweet spot, Highland County. Best known for the annual Highland Maple Festival, designated a “Local Legacy” in 1999 by the Library of Congress, Highland County is home to the southernmost commercial maple syrup producing industry in the United States.



LURES (cont'd)

The high-end Omni Homestead Resort is located in Hot Springs in Bath County. Meeting space is available at the Homestead, Hotel Roanoke and other various hotels in the region, but supply is generally lower than in many other areas of the state.

Virginia’s Blue Ridge has become known as America’s Mountain Biking Capital, with a Silver Level Ride Center designation by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA). Outdoor lovers can enjoy 1,000 miles of trails for mountain biking and hiking, plus blueways and water trails for paddling, kayaking, and canoeing. The nearby Explore Park offers camping in yurts and pod cabins, while the new Treetop Quest offers an aerial adventure course with ziplines. Explore Park also offers tubing, bike trails, event space and dining at Brugh Tavern. Additionally, Smith Mountain Lake with 500 miles of shoreline and Philpott Lake with 100 miles of shoreline allow visitors to have ample experiences in and out of the water from swimming, fishing and boating to camping and hiking.

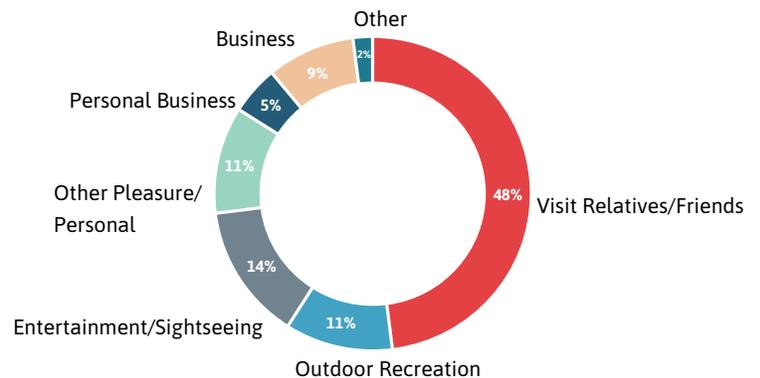
The Berglund Center in Roanoke hosts a variety of sports, performing arts, and demonstration events, as does the Salem Civic Center. Roanoke also features the Taubman Museum of Art, while the Blue Ridge Institute and Museum serves as a major stop on The Crooked Road: Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail, and the Harvester Performance Center in Rocky Mount boasts two stages that feature a variety of touring acts. For craft beer lovers, Roanoke is home to the Deschutes tasting room, and over two dozen other breweries and wineries can be found throughout the region. The region hosts a multitude of cultural festivals including Local Colors, Festival of India, the Greek Festival, and more.

In addition to the educational partnerships of Radford University and Virginia Tech with Carilion Clinic, five additional higher education institutions main campuses call the Virginia Mountains region home. These include Dabney S. Lancaster Community College, Ferrum College, Hollins University, Roanoke College and Virginia Western Community College. Many other universities from across the Commonwealth have satellite locations at the Higher Education Center in Downtown Roanoke, stimulating economic growth in the greater Roanoke area by providing greater access to education and in many cases, bringing new conference and meeting audiences to the region.

HIGHLIGHTS OF REGIONAL LURES

- **Scenic beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities:**
 - Appalachian Mountain Range, notably the Blue Ridge Mountains
 - Appalachian Trail, Blue Ridge Parkway, George Washington & Jefferson Forests, Booker T Washington Monument
 - Mountain biking (IMBA Silver Certification)
 - Roanoke Star
- **State parks:** Douthat State Park and Smith Mountain Lake State Park
- American history
- **Notable Towns & Cities:** Roanoke, Bedford, Clifton Forge, Hot Springs, Rocky Mount, Buchanan
- The Omni Homestead Resort, Hotel Roanoke
- Interstate connectivity
- University presence

Past visitors to the region cite the following as the primary purpose of their trip and top activities they participated in during their visit:



Top Activities

Visiting Relatives	32%
Shopping	32%
Historic sites/Churches	24%
Rural Sightseeing	23%
Museums	19%
Visiting Friends	18%
Fine dining	16%
State parks/Monuments	14%
Urban Sightseeing	13%
National parks/Monuments	12%

CHANGES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

In recent years, changes in the Virginia Mountains region have helped to spur tourism. In 2017, Amtrak added passenger service to Roanoke via the Northeast Regional Line accessing Washington DC, New York City and Boston. Also, the establishment of “Virginia Mountains” as its own tourism region has allowed for greater definition and focus of regional tourism efforts.

Adding to the region’s outdoor recreation offering, Hinchee Park Trail opened in Roanoke County in September 2019 — a two-mile trail located in a 235-acre preserve connecting Hanging Rock Battlefield Trail with Carvins Cove Natural Reserve. Roanoke’s Explore Park continues to build out its master plan and now includes seasonal camping, as well as tubing and kayaking down the Roanoke River with Blue Mountain Adventures. A winter walk of lights, called Illuminights, transforms a .5 mile wooded path into a dazzling world of 500,000 lights.

Clifton Forge welcomed the opening of the Masonic Theatre and Masonic Amphitheatre, a new performing arts space, which also offers classes and can be reserved for meetings, while Roanoke saw the opening of Dr. Pepper Park at The Bridges. Also new to the event venue landscape is The Barn at Back Creek Farm in Buchanan, The Farm at Glen Haven in Clifton Forge, and Bailey Wick Farm and Woodsdale Manor, both in Fincastle.

In 2019, Bedford Area Tourism rebranded itself as Destination Bedford, and the new brand promotes activities and attractions such as The Peaks of Otter, The National D-Day Memorial, Bedford Boys Tribute Center, Smith Mountain Lake, and Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest. Bedford also welcomed the opening of Beale’s Brewery.

Finally, in Franklin County their reputation as the “Moonshine Capital of the World” has continued to gain traction as a unique differentiator and may represent more product opportunities in the near future.



FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES

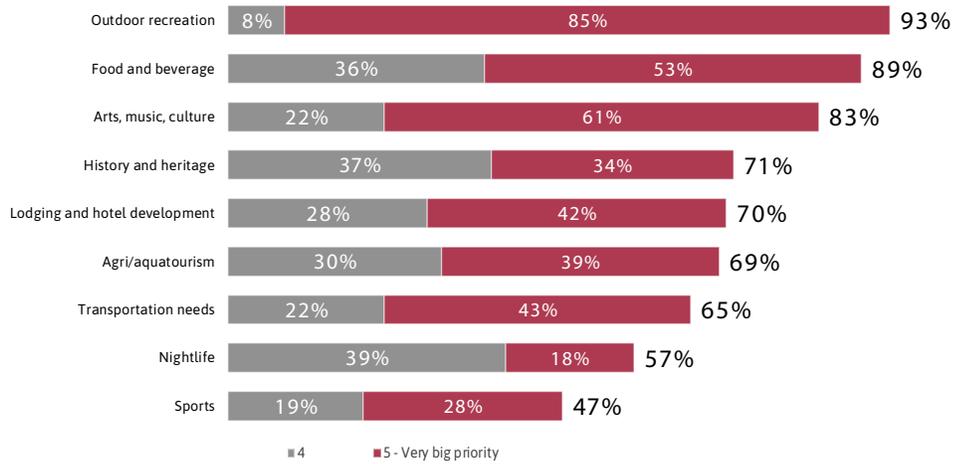
According to the Virginia Office of Outdoor Recreation, Virginia’s outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and supports the livelihood of more than 197,000 Virginians. In addition, outdoor recreation is cited by one in four Virginia visitors as one of their top trip purposes.

In recognition of this impact, the Virginia Mountains region tourism industry leaders identify outdoor recreation as the top priority need — particularly when it comes to better understanding how to develop and promote outdoor product offerings and experiences.

The Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3 Virginia’s Blue Ridge triathlon, to be held in the Virginia’s Blue Ridge, should serve the region as both an economic driver and an awareness booster of the region’s assets, as it takes participants on a 1.2-mile swim at Carvins Cove, a 56-mile bicycle ride through Botetourt County and the Blue Ridge Parkway, and a 13.1-mile run on the Roanoke River Greenway, with the race finishing at River’s Edge Park.

Home to two state parks, the region includes numerous other assets to support future outdoor recreation experiences. Roanoke, the largest city located on the Appalachian Trail, provides close proximity to the local mountain trio of Dragon’s Tooth, McAfee Knob, and Tinker Cliffs, collectively known as the Triple Crown of Virginia along the trail. And the region is also home to the Blue Ridge Parkway, providing easy access to 1,000 miles of trails in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, as well as Smith Mountain Lake — the “Jewel of the Blue Ridge.”

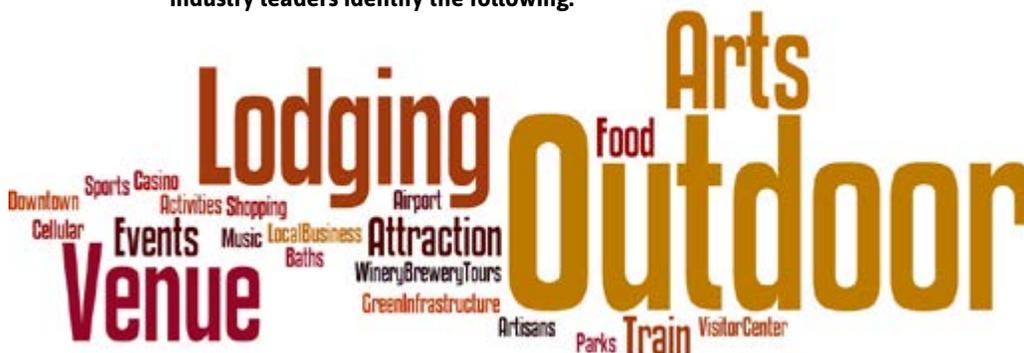
When asked to what degree are the following a priority for your region, industry leaders responded:



In terms of improving outdoor offerings, three-quarters of stakeholders say priority focus should be on hiking, trail development, and park improvements. And while the region has been working on these areas, including possible further expansion to Explore Park, more can be done to increase the number of offerings and to tie the offerings together to create more enhanced experiences for visitors.

For example, historical trail development has gained recent focus in areas with a high number of related sites to the Lewis & Clark Western Migration route. Botetourt and Roanoke have joined partners from Bristol to Albemarle to discuss developing the Lewis & Clark Eastern Legacy Trail. In 2019, these partners received portrait signage markers from the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation in an effort to provide support to sites with a recognized Lewis & Clark connection.

When asked to name a potential game changer for the region, industry leaders identify the following:



FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES (cont'd)

In terms of the lodging landscape, the anticipated reopening of the Jefferson Pools at the Omni Homestead Resort should provide a lift to the hotel. Renewed focus on building vibrant communities through food and beverage offerings and art, music, and cultural experiences will make the region's small towns great places to live and visit.

The region is certainly not devoid of dining offerings and the craft brew scene has especially been growing with 12 craft breweries and tasting rooms in the region. That being said, the region spans a wide geography, and offering more unique dining options, coupled with brewery, winery, and distillery experiences, will help communities throughout the region, not just in the major pockets like Roanoke.

Also, the region provides great opportunities for innovative partnerships, such as the continued expansion of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, which originally opened in 2010 and the 2019 merger of Radford University Carilion, all located in the City of Roanoke. Such projects have heightened the need for continued growth of new lodging facilities throughout the region.

Sports tourism also presents opportunities for the region. Virginia's Blue Ridge hosted more than 200 sporting events in 2018 alone, and with increased support and funding, the region has an opportunity to accelerate this. The previously mentioned Ironman is an event that can help add to the story of the region as a destination for sports tourism.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Based upon Drive 2.0 research and in consideration of the tourism situation, the Virginia Mountains region should focus on the following primary and secondary product opportunities.

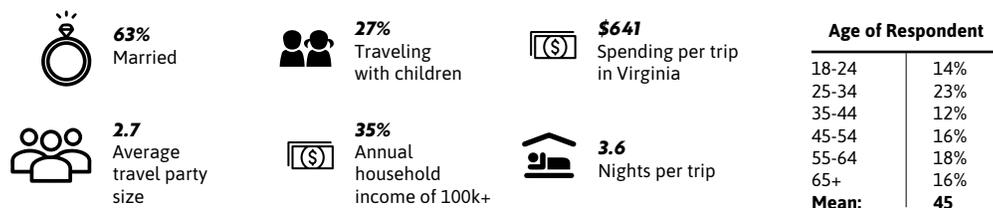
- **Primary:**
Nature & Outdoor Recreation, Town/City Centers, Sports, Culinary (Agritourism, Dining, Libations), Arts & Music, Lodging
- **Secondary:**
Industry (Corporate/Business Base), Commercial Attractions (Family, Higher-end)





CURRENT VISITORS

According to research collected by VTC and TravelTrakAmerica, the primary visitors are:



EMERGING NICHE MARKETS

As the region examines ways to broaden its customer base, keep in mind the key demographic reality facing Virginia and the country today and in the immediate future. Currently, minority children are being born at a higher rate than white children, and by 2044, the country's combined minority populations will comprise most of the total population. The shift toward a more diverse, pluralistic society is already underway, and making everyone feel welcome can become a differentiating attribute and strategic advantage, appealing to a broader demographic base of potential visitors.

In addition, operators across the board are showing significant increases in female visitation, especially in outdoor and active travel experiences, which represents another opportunity to increase the region's customer base. So, whether promoting a girl's trip or a solo adventure, a heightened focus on female travelers may also prove beneficial.

Building equity in your region as a diverse and inclusive place to visit, as well as one with appeal for women travelers, will be greatly aided by finding and enlisting ambassadors who can speak to these values and attributes. And, since nearly half of visitors come to spend time with friends and family, helping them understand all there is to see and do, and where to take their friends and family when they come to visit, can enhance the visitor experience and help residents see the value of tourism in their community.

EMERGING NICHE MARKETS (cont'd)

Additional opportunity audiences based on growing trends include:

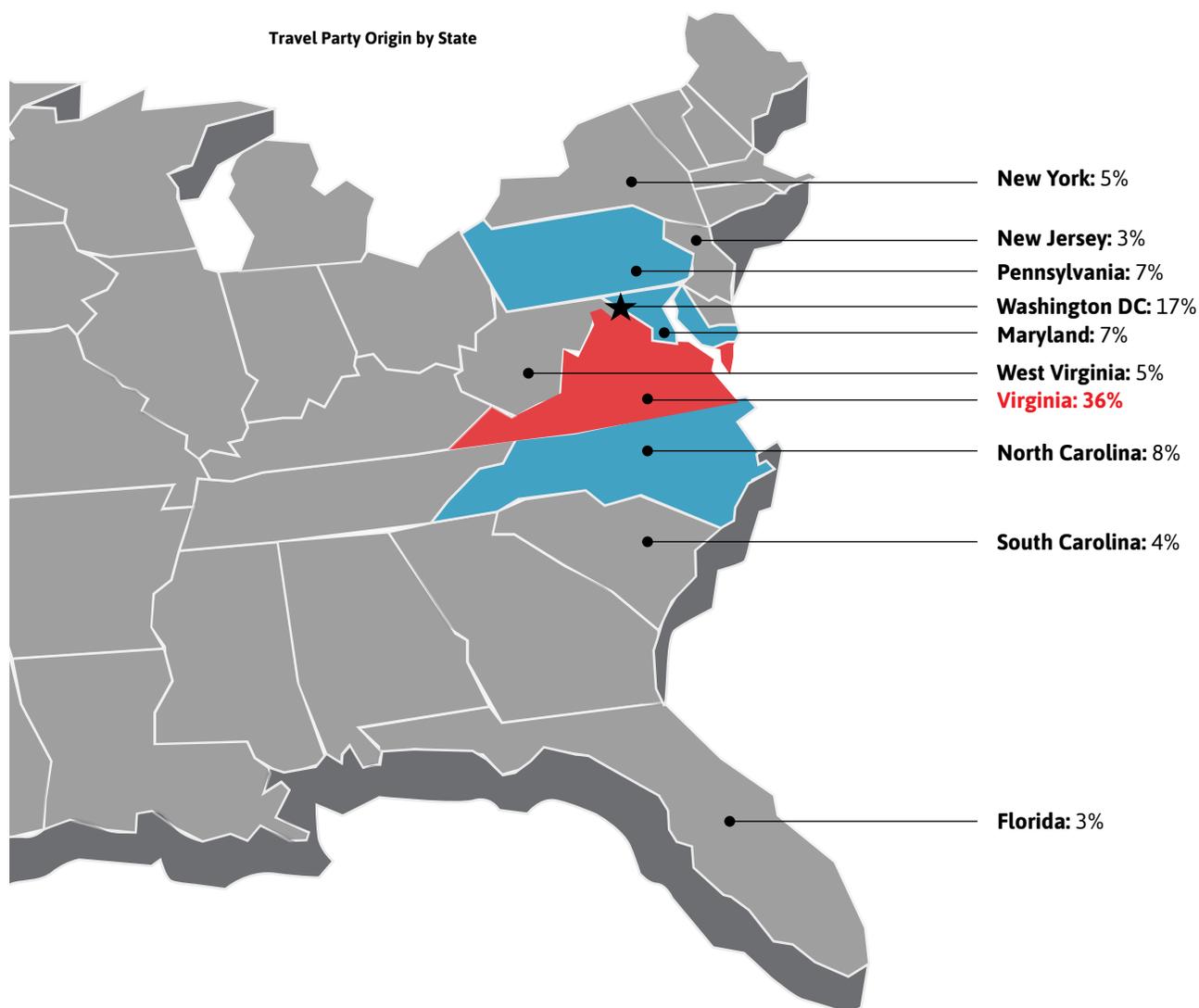
TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR VA MOUNTAINS
<p>OUTDOOR RECREATION</p>	<p>The outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and supports the livelihood of more than 197,000 Virginians. Outdoor recreation is cited by one in four Virginia visitors as one of their top trip purposes. And, this year Virginia established the Office of Outdoor Recreation, placing even more importance on this industry.</p>	<p>Virginia is experiencing a rising tide when it comes to outdoor recreation. It is overwhelmingly the biggest focus for industry leaders across the state. And with the new state office in place, we should strike while the iron is hot. Pour resources into these experiences and think about ways to connect experiences across localities. Trail development is a great place to start.</p>
<p>MINI-CATIONS</p>	<p>According to Allianz, over half of Americans last year did not take a vacation longer than 4 nights. Millennials are leading this movement.</p>	<p>Campaigns like the recent Crush Friday are a great example of efforts to take advantage of this trend. Consider other marketing campaigns and packages that encourage younger generations to take their vacation for a long weekend trip. Since Virginia Mountains region’s average length of stay is already 3.6 nights, there is opportunity to build on the 72-hour trip experience.</p>
<p>THE RISE OF PLACEMAKING</p>	<p>With the unemployment rate at 3.7%, a 49-year low, companies and organizations are all challenged with finding qualified talent. Understanding that younger people are going to be even harder to find in the future, enlightened companies are moving or concentrating their footprint in Millennial hotspots – entire markets, as well as areas within a market, such as downtown urban centers. As such, city planners, destination managers, and other organizations are embracing intentional strategies to improve their locations (placemaking) and to promote their locations (place marketing).</p>	<p>Develop strategies to make your location a more desirable place to live, work, play, learn, and visit as competition for workforce is going to become increasingly fierce. Engage community members, leaders, and past and prospective visitors in determining the attributes that make your location unique and appealing. Craft a differentiating and compelling narrative and strategic marketing platform which all community stakeholders can use to spur word-of-mouth buzz and successfully tout your location.</p>



GROWING OPPORTUNITY OF NEARBY DRIVE MARKETS

National tourism trends suggest leisure travel is now a year-round activity, with shorter, more frequent trips taking the place of traditional week-long summer vacations. This translates into the increasing value and impact of near versus far-away markets.

With the average trip length of 3.6 nights, the Virginia Mountains region is no exception, and according to a TravelTrakAmerica survey, half of Virginia Mountains’ travelers (51%) originate from nearby drive markets — Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Washington DC. This concentrated primary feeder area gives all of Virginia Mountains’ destinations and industry leaders an opportunity to work closer together in promotional planning to target prospective visitors



COMPETITION

Given the Virginia Mountains' primary natural and outdoor recreational lures, the primary competitors identified through this effort include North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, and West Virginia.

COMPETITOR	PRIMARY LURES
NORTH CAROLINA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outdoor recreation 2. Asheville / Smoky Mountains 3. Professional sports (basketball, football, NASCAR)
EASTERN TENNESSEE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dollywood 2. Great Smoky Mountains 3. Shopping
WEST VIRGINIA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outdoor recreation (hiking, whitewater rafting, skiing) 2. Entertainment (Casinos, spas) 3. Hunting / fishing

The Virginia Mountains region faces difficulty differentiating itself from these competitive destinations — mainly since they offer similar recreational opportunities and are more competitively marketed, therefore having more brand recognition. In addition, West Virginia and Tennessee's outdoor experiences, for example, are clustered in close proximity to one another, offering a one-stop shop for an active outdoor vacation with opportunities for families and outdoor enthusiasts to experience many activities in one area. Eastern Tennessee is also well promoted for its outdoor experiences and packages for activities like rafting, zip lines, and ropes courses. Similarly, Western North Carolina, including Asheville and its surrounding towns, offers not just similar outdoor experiences (rafting, zip line, fishing, camping), it also shares the Blue Ridge Parkway and Blue Ridge heritage with Virginia. Asheville has also developed into a strong arts and culinary destination, recognized for local farm-to-table restaurants, high-profile chefs and restaurants, and craft breweries.

In appealing to prospective visitors, Virginia Mountains' destinations and travel attractions must realize that competing head to head from a siloed or individual experience perspective (my outdoor attraction versus one in Asheville) is less effective than the hub and spoke method of bundling experiences together. While these states also offer mountain town experiences, including heritage, arts, and culture, the Virginia Mountains region is differentiated by its own unique history and towns with an authentic combination of additional opportunities such as outdoor recreation, beer, arts, agritourism, and other visitor experiences. This is the hub and spoke method in action.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES (VOIDS)

Like many areas with smaller commercial airports, the Virginia Mountains region is challenged by its small number of domestic flight destinations from the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. While Amtrak’s entry to the area in 2017 was helpful in alleviating some of the challenges with limited flights, the region still relies on drivers for much of its tourism traffic. This is particularly challenging given severe congestion (particularly commercial truck traffic) on I-81, the primary interstate serving the area and new construction due to the new state funding of \$2.2 billion for I-81 projects.

While the region possesses a range of lodging options, there are opportunities to increase the number of offerings to provide a wider range of lodging options for visitors beyond the somewhat limited scope of camping/RV parks, cottages and cabins, and the upscale Omni Homestead Resort.

Given the breadth of outdoor recreation offerings, it appears the region is somewhat underserved when it comes to the number of outfitters. New offerings have come online in areas like Covington and more offerings should continue to be encouraged.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

- Differentiation from competition in nearby states — outdoors
- Experiences are dispersed throughout the region
- Limited recognition of assets and towns
- Limited upscale hotel supply
- Declining populations

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR VA MOUNTAINS
AGING POPULATION	The age wave is washing over Virginia. Over the next 14 years, America’s 65+ population will increase by roughly 60%, growing from 10 to 20% of the total population. Nationally, we will have 74 million people over the age of 65, compared to only 46 million today. Some counties of Virginia will experience a dramatic increase in seniors, where up to 40% of the population will be 65 or older.	Recognize Baby Boomers (today’s new seniors) as an increasingly important tourism segment; however, it is important to understand that they won’t be looking for the types of experiences their parents sought. The region should work to make attractions and destinations more appealing to Boomers and their desires to stay active and enhance their vitality. The region’s excellent outdoor and nature experiences, along with space, should be very appealing to this audience.
SHIFTING FOOTPRINT	The country’s population growth over the past century has been concentrated in urban and suburban areas. Likewise, 80% of Virginia’s population growth is projected to occur in the “Golden Crescent” corridor that runs from D.C. through Northern Virginia, Richmond, Williamsburg, and Hampton Roads. This growth in urban areas is being accelerated by Millennials, who prefer downtowns, activity centers, and 15-minute “livable” communities close to everything.	Outside of the Roanoke area, much of the region consists of rural areas. To face the rising economic challenges of declining rural populations and accompanying tax revenue, the region must invest resources in tourism as an economic engine. Positioning the destination’s travel and tourism assets and identifying ways to expose potential new residents to the area is critical.



REGIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Bundling or packaging experiences for potential visitors' consideration continues to gain traction. According to TripAdvisor, "[they're] seeing more travelers balancing their itineraries with a mix of classic sightseeing and more unique local experiences." Virginia Mountains travel and tourism efforts may be behind this trend, as existing assets appear to be siloed, with few regional cross promotions, connectivity, or packaging of complementary experiences. This is especially true between towns and cities across the region.

Regional efforts can also be supported through higher education resources, which may provide great opportunities for innovative partnerships, such as the continued expansion of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. And while Virginia Tech's main campus is located outside the region in Blacksburg, it is only 30 minutes from Downtown Roanoke. Its proximity can help build far-reaching partnerships as well. Many colleges and universities within an hour drive are a huge opportunity for collaboration for the region.

REGIONAL OPPORTUNITY (cont'd)

Additional opportunities for the region based on growing national trends, include:

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR VA MOUNTAINS
SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL	There is a growing economy and movement toward stewardship of the Earth and our cultures. Destinations and attractions are participating in this movement by promoting low impact and green experiences and practices.	In a region rich with natural assets, wildlife, and small towns, low impact experiences are important. Think about ways to highlight the low impact visitors will have on nature, the wildlife, and the small towns. In visiting, they can contribute to the vibrancy of the local economy in a sustainable way so generations can continue to enjoy the beautiful region and its rich culture.
UNPLUGGING	People are constantly connected these days, whether it's with work or maintaining their social presence online. As a result, people are increasingly wanting to fully disconnect when on vacation. The travel industry is taking notice. Many travel firms are offering trips that require clients to leave phones at home (or in the hotel). Some hotels no longer tout "free WiFi" and instead offer programs that promote "tech detoxes."	Find ways to partner with hotels or attractions to see if there are ways to embrace this trend. With Virginia's strength in outdoor recreation there are great opportunities to promote experiences outside where phones are not allowed.
SPACE	While not everyone can afford a trip to space, interest in space is growing. Dark Sky locations, observatories, and even stations are growing in popularity.	The Virginia Mountains has immense opportunity to capitalize on the growing trend of dark skies given the breadth of parks, forests, and rural areas. The region has an opportunity in potentially seeking out official designations to add to its offerings.
CAMPING	Camping and glamping is increasingly popular, especially among Millennials. Moreover, they prefer these trips to be within 100 miles from where they live.	This is another trend that will fall in line with the growing outdoor recreation focus. Consider ways to highlight camping trips of all kinds – the off-the-beaten-path to a unique view, or the best of both worlds trip with a hike, a craft brew and a campsite under the stars.
SPORTS	Sports tourism is one of the fastest growing travel industries. Worldwide it equates to \$7.68 billion. The Travel Industry of America reports that nearly 40% of American adults each year travel 50 miles or more to a sporting event. But it's not just attending sporting events, it's also hosting youth tournaments and providing venues that attract year-round events drawing hundreds, often thousands of visitors.	While the Commonwealth does not support any major league sports teams, the state is beginning to hone its focus on sports tourism. Virginia Mountains are no exception. Whether it's popular college sports or hosting large sports tournaments, there are great opportunities for the region to take advantage of.

PROMOTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

Based on the situation and analysis of the Virginia Mountains region, the following set of recommendations are offered in order of priority:

1. **Connect and promote Virginia Mountains' outdoor experiences.** While almost every town and city across the region are improving their outdoor products to appeal to outdoor enthusiasts, there is an opportunity to build an even greater set of experiences by connecting each submarket's offerings. Virginia Mountains' outdoor attractions and destinations should band together to create even more connected experiences.
 - **Bike Trails:** Statewide, bike trails are connecting sites and experiences across multiple jurisdictions. For example, the 52-mile Virginia Capital Trail connects the Commonwealth's past and present capitals, and the New River Trail meanders 57 miles through four counties while paralleling the river for which it's named. As the most recent addition to an extensive greenway system in Virginia's Blue Ridge that connects more than 550 miles of trails in the region, the Hinchee Park Trail falls directly in line with this philosophy. What might other broad-scale efforts look like?

To get inspired about how to formulate a nationwide product development plan, see DRIVE 2.0's How To Guide #2: Enhance Experiences.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES (cont'd)

2. **Promote Vibrant Communities.** As communities throughout the region continue to invest in assets that contribute to building vibrant communities — arts, music, events, culinary, beer and wine — regional approaches should also be supported. Consider creating itineraries that provide routes for visitors to hop from one historic main street to the next. Or perhaps, they are themed around hiking, wineries, beer, cycling, music, or a combination.
3. **Bundle and package experiences using the hub and spoke method to increase the overall appeal of individual attractions and offerings.** Overall, the region's primary lures should adopt a packaging perspective to increase average spending and room nights in the Virginia Mountains. Focusing on just one lure will make it more challenging for the region to compete against similar offerings in other states.

The region has the right lures that make up vibrant communities and working to further connect them can help increase the entire region's appeal. For example, potential exists to create weekend itineraries that allow visitors to mountain bike, brewery hop, catch a concert, and stay in a charming inn with a top restaurant. Think about how to bundle these experiences across localities to increase the unique experience and drive people to turn their day trip or overnight into a two- or three-day trip.



PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

HUB & SPOKE

In considering all of the research to date, the following development hub and spoke approach is recommended for the Virginia Mountains region as a whole:



Exercise: See which trends support this development hub & spoke.

TREND 1

TREND 2

TREND 3

VISION FOR VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

The vision for the Virginia Mountains regional plan is to collaboratively build upon the natural assets in an authentic manner and to further develop outdoor recreation, food and beverage, and arts, music, and culture — the foundation of vibrant communities — to sustainably maximize the region’s tourism potential.

SUMMARY

The Virginia Mountains region has incredible opportunity, and through increased collaboration, teamwork, and a common vision across jurisdictions, the region can be even more competitive with nearby destinations in North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The communities and assets are there, but regionalism is key to growth. Through better connectivity and cohesion, together we can take the entire region to the next level.





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