visit mendocino county
2017/18 marketing plan

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2017/18 marketing plan

This Marketing Plan is our collective, community vision of tourism promotion for Mendocino County. Our new theme for the county, "Find Your Happy," invites visitors to go farther... around the corner and off the grid to discover our authentic destination.

Fiscal year 2017/18 promises to bring change across the board to Visit Mendocino County, which we are happy to announce in the following Marketing Plan.

executive summary: creating the future

"Visit Mendocino County stewards and amplifies the total Mendocino County experience."

This is the newly minted Mission statement for our enterprise, standing at the top of our Visit Mendocino County: Strategic Direction 2-17/18-2019/20 plan. Developed with the help of many stakeholders countywide with consultation from the Corragio Group, the plan is just one part of the forward-looking initiatives undertaken by the MCTC Board of Directors last fiscal year to help to set the stage for our coming growth and success.

The Board also commissioned work by marketing firm TheorySF to identify the messaging and direction that will lead us there. After considerable research and targeted consumer testing, "Find Your Happy" carried the day as a thematic tagline for us to build a comprehensive marketing effort. And the Board also navigated changes in staffing, culminating with the appointment of a new Executive Director. The VMC team is now set and poised to deliver, as our Vision reads, "Enriching experiences for our guests, enhanced lifestyle for our residents, and stability and diversity for our economy."

Throughout our entire organization, we seek to create a culture of collaboration, shared effort, and outstanding service. Our new and returning guests – as well as our valued partners – deserve nothing less.

In their first full year of service, both our Board of Directors and BID Advisory Board worked extremely hard to keep VMC on a steady course and, more importantly, invest in the future. In working so diligently over the prior year, both Boards demonstrated the depth of their commitment, talent, and foresight. This holds true for our various committees as well, and we look for that generosity of effort to continue.

True to our Mission, all of our visitor-facing marketing efforts—website, social media channels, newsletter, visitor guide, and other elements—will be reimagined for greater visual impact and appeal as well as sharper, brighter messaging, hewing to our central theme. We'll aim to inspire as well as inform, enabling visitors to imagine, plan for, and then truly enjoy, the Mendocino experience.

Our commitment, of course, is to market the entire county, celebrating its rich diversity, its soaring beauty, and its welcoming, creative people. We will continue to pursue efforts in domestic and international markets, evaluate our progress, and report transparently. Our aim is to increase visitation and visitor spending, and thus contribute to greater tax revenues, to the benefit of all.

This marketing plan reports on our strategies, tactics, and goals for the coming fiscal year. As always, we appreciate the opportunity to work with you in promoting our exceptional communities.

Our doors are open – let us know what you think at any time. We value your input as well as your trust.

Respectfully,
Alan Humason, Executive Director
Visit Mendocino County

strategic plan

vision, mission and values

At the beginning of 2017, Visit Mendocino County worked with the Coraggio Group, a strategic planning company, whose task was to realign the core strategies of the organization in a three-year Strategic Plan. The process engaged Board members, stakeholders, staff, and business leaders in a series of iterative meetings that built upon each other to produce the vision, mission and values set out below. (The Strategic Plan is attached to this Marketing Plan as Appendix 1.) With the Strategic Plan goals in mind, each future initiative undertaken by VMC—in public relations, advertising, marketing, social media, etc.—will relate to and be accountable to the plan's imperatives.

Vision: Enriching experiences for our guests, enhanced lifestyle for our residents, and stability and diversity for our economy

Mission: Visit Mendocino County stewards and amplifies the total Mendocino County experience.

Values:

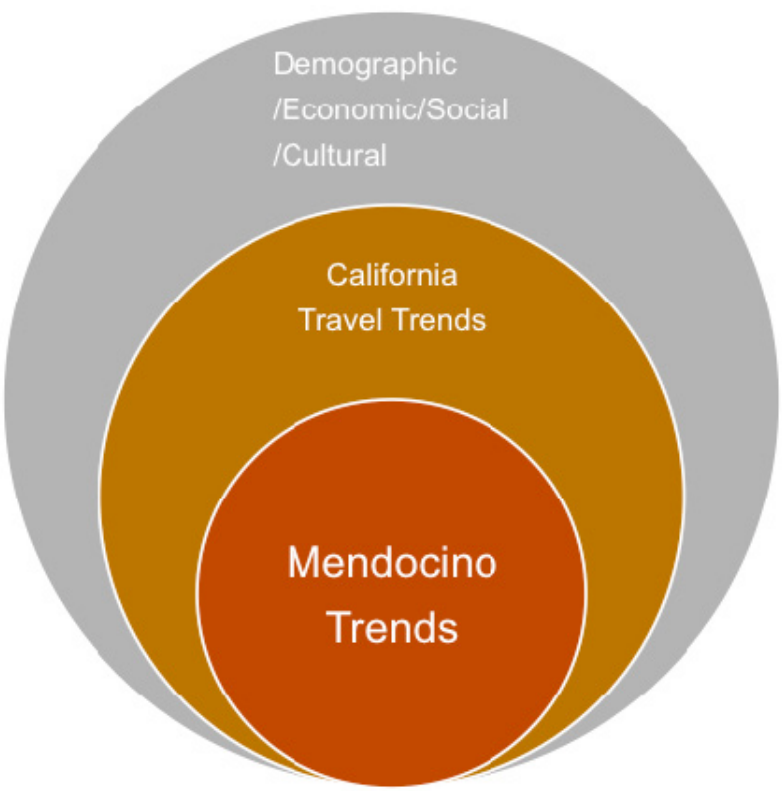
- Transparency: We foster trust through openness and integrity.
- Accountability: We are outcome-oriented and professional.
- Partnership: We create alignment through inclusive and meaningful relationships.
- Community: We contribute to the fabric of Mendocino County.
- Innovation: Our creativity reflects the uniqueness of our cultures and landscapes.

2017/18 situation analysis

key trends impacting mendocino county tourism

Every tourism destination operates in a rapidly changing and fluid market environment subject to a variety of market influences, including economic, travel, social, cultural, and demographic trends. As such, it is important to understand the changing environment in which the organization is operating.

Significant changes have occurred and will continue to occur at the national, state and local level that impact tourism destinations like Mendocino. These shifts are primarily the result of a dramatically changed economic environment although there are also changes in demographics, travel, socio-cultural, and consumer value trends that tourism decision makers should be aware of. For the purposes of background and context, **the following is a summary of the key tourism, economic, and demographic trends that will help to provide a comprehensive context for the development of the Mendocino strategic marketing direction.**



1. economic/demographic/socio-cultural trends

A. Economic Trends

The economy continues to be positive… though challenges may lie ahead.

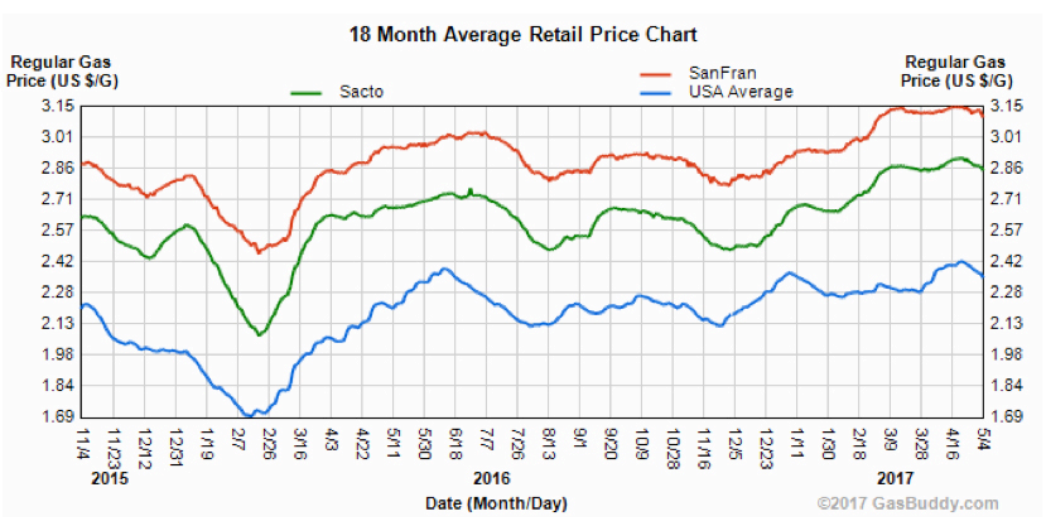
The U.S. and California economies continue to be strong performers. As you can see in the table below both the U.S. and California economies continue at a good pace. The consumer price index is projected to be approximately 2%, which may make price increases more challenging.

Key U.S. and California Economic Indicators | % Change						
	2015	2016	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
U.S. Gross Domestic Product	3.0%	3.4%	2.7%	2.2%	2.2%	2%
Unemployment CA	6.5%	6.0%	5.8%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%
Unemployment U.S.	5.5%	5.2%	5.2%	4.6%	4.6%	4.6%
Personal Income Growth CA	5.3%	5.4%	5.1%	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%
Personal Income Growth U.S.	3.9%	4.5%	5.3%	4.9%	5.0%	4.8%
Consumer Price Index CA	2.1%	1.9%	2.1%	2.9%	2.9%	2.8%
Consumer Price Index U.S.	0.0%	2.2%	2.1%	2.3%	2.2%	2.2%

Source: State of California, Department of Finance

Given that Mendocino is in close proximity to its core Northern California market, low gas prices are also a positive indicator for travel. As can be seen in the chart below prices, while still favorable, are well above the average. Despite this pricing differential consumers are willing to spend for travel by car. This is important to Mendocino County because it is a drive market and does not support an in-county airport.

Figure 2: Gas Price Trend 2015-20167 *(Source:Gas Buddy.com)*

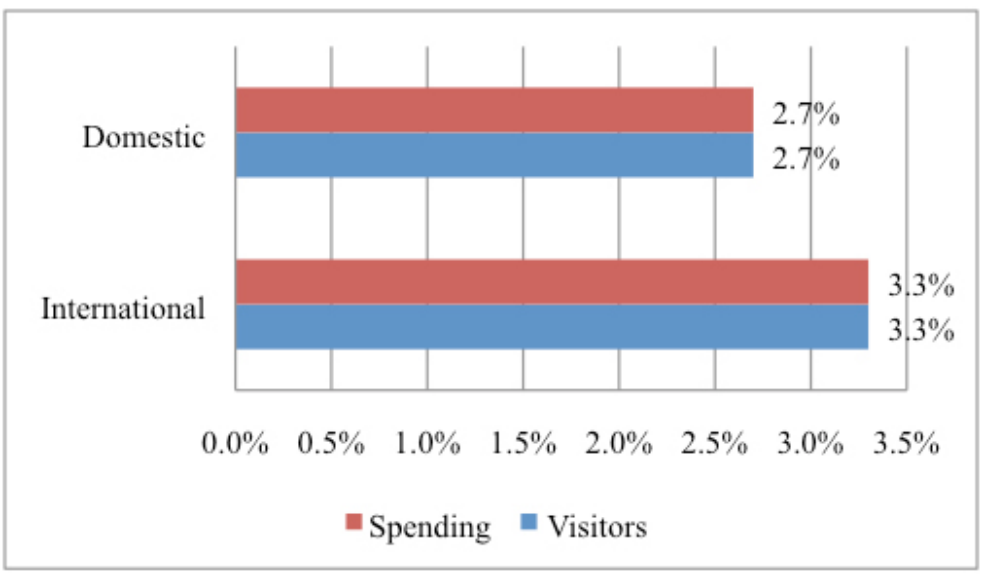


B. Domestic & International Travel

International travel continues but will U.S. policy have an impact?

International travel will continue to grow, especially from China. Overseas arrivals or **inbound travel is projected to increase 3.7% in 2017** over 2016 levels. Travel spending by all international visitors is projected to increase to $246 billion.

Total Domestic and International Travel 2016 Projections | % Change



Source: U.S. Travel Association

As can be seen above, international travel has been a consistent growth segment. However there may be potential impact from current administration policies that tighten entry to the United States.

C. California Demographic Trends

The face of California continues to change.

The California population continues to change in two key areas:

1. **A shift in age demographics by 2018**[1]

   Millennials, Gen-Xers and Baby Boomers will continue to be important segments today and in the future. In California, the following trends will help to shape Visit Mendocino County marketing efforts.

1 Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy

2. A continuing shift in ethnicity

California boasts the largest minority population in the United States among Latino and Asian populations, which will continue to grow. Latinos will become the single largest ethnic group within the next decade, and by 2020 will comprise the majority of the population. Currently Latinos represent the single largest ethnic group among the under 35-year-old category in the state.[2]

Race/Ethnicity	2020	Percentage
Non-Hispanic		
White	15,335,634	38%
Black	2,340,931	6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	168,606	0%
Asian	5,259,122	13%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	130,144	0%
Multiracial (two or more of the above)	1,255,706	3%
Hispanic		
Any race	16,229,857	40%
Total	40,719,999	100%

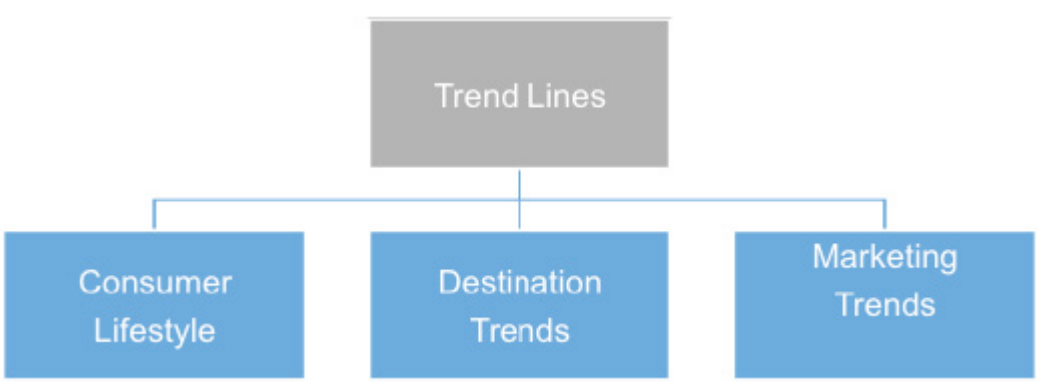
Source: State of California: Department of Finance Demographic Projections

This ethnic shift represents an opportunity to attract potential visitors through a range of cultural activities, events and interests available in Mendocino County. Both of these shifts will continue to impact California tourism and potentially create opportunities for Mendocino County in the years to come.

D. Social and Cultural Trends

Lots of Change

The following consumer lifestyle trends are important to increase awareness and demand for the destination.



2 Johnson, Hans, "California's Future", Public Policy Institute of California, February 2015

Consumer Lifestyle Trends: Consumers are Driving Change

- **Millennials**
  Millennials are now the largest generation in history, exceeding Baby Boomers. They are also the most influential in major trends and tastes.

- **People are seeking a deeper connection to travel brands and destinations**
  Travelers today are looking to align with brands and destinations that have similar values and beliefs.

- **Female Solo Travel**
  Approximately 80% of trip decisions are made by women. According to Trekksoft, fully 72% of woman took a solo trip and that number is expected to increase.

- **Technology is real time**
  As one-to-one marketing continues, new apps are being developed to make relevant suggestions to visitors no matter where they are in a destination; these include dining, shopping etc. suggestions that relate wherever you're located.

- **Alternative travel – the shared economy**
  The shared economy has gone mainstream. Transactions are easier, discovering shared economy suppliers is faster, and feedback is transparent. This trend will continue to especially impact the property rental market.

- **"Wellness" is the new hospitality**
  Destinations and hotels are adding on wellness features to accommodate changing consumer tastes.

Destination Trends: Destinations are Reflecting their Culture

- **Active and adventure trips**
  Consumers today are looking more and more toward active vacations including hiking, biking and the full range of outdoor activities.

- **Food tourism**
  Food experiences are no longer just focused on restaurant trends but include a whole variety of related activities including Farm to Table, cooking classes, farmers markets and more.

- **Choosing a destination for culture**
  According to Trip Advisor, 47% of travelers say they have visited a destination because of local culture and the people of a specific country. The same can be true for a destination.

- **Responsible tourism**
  More and more consumers are opting for sustainable tourism and 2017 is the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism.

- **Mobile photography**
  As tourists look for ways to document their travels, mobile phones have become the camera of choice. Smart destinations are providing visitors with insight to the best places and times to get the best pictures, sunrise to sunset people are looking to connect with a destination using their camera.

- **Rise of the boutique destination**
  Visitors are looking for emphasis on local unique experiences. Destinations need to focus on what truly differentiates them, and not what they think consumers want them to be.

- **Local experiences will make memories and connections**
  As destinations become more and more similar ("Something for everyone!") the smart ones will look to connect visitors with local experiences. The more authentic you are, the less you have to spend marketing dollars to differentiate your destination. It's the local experiences like the cool place to eat, or the best place to walk the beach or best place to see a sunset that make the difference for many visitors.

- **Hipster holidays are hip!**
  A new breed of traveler is looking to not just find a cool destination but also find places within a destination that are cool and hip before everyone else does.

Marketing and Communications Trends

- **Visual imagery continues to be important in tourism marketing**
  As social media has become augmented with visual apps like Instagram and Snapchat, destinations are looking to more fully integrate this visual format into their marketing efforts. Visit California now has over 100 videos potential visitors can access in finding out about California. Likewise, visitors are using this format more and more to share their vacation experiences.

- **Traveler flexibility and control – research everything**
  With the continued growth of online and mobile resources, consumers looking for flexibility and control of their vacation decisions have the ability to research everything and often do it not only in pre-trip planning but once a trip is underway.

- **Greater degree of personalization**
  Facilitated by increased data mining capabilities, marketing efforts will lead to customization for each consumer. destination marketing organizations (DMOs) will focus more and more on customized targeting and the speed of using that data will continue to increase.

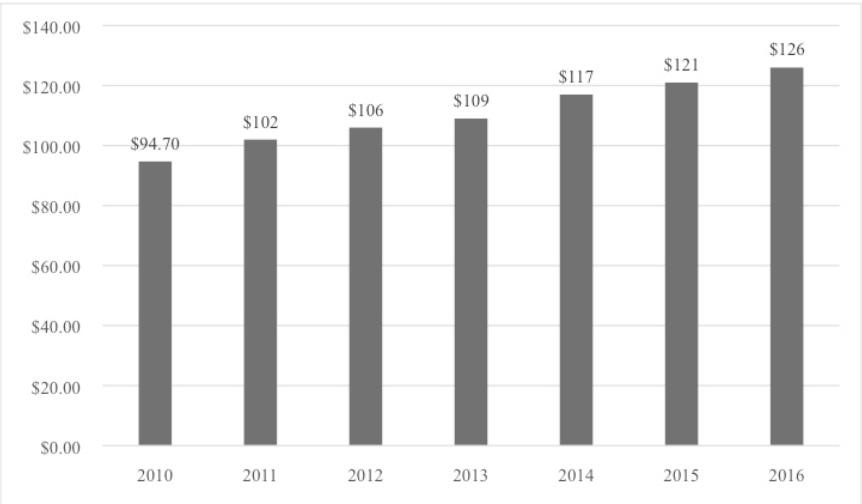
E. California Travel Trends

California travel spending continues to break new records.

Domestic

Each year, California residents and visitors travel within the state to experience its variety of attractions, scenic beauty and local culture. According to the most recently released data by Visit California[3], **the state generated $126 billion in direct travel spending in 2016,** a 4% increase over the preceding year.

California Travel Spending | 2010-2016 ($ Billions)

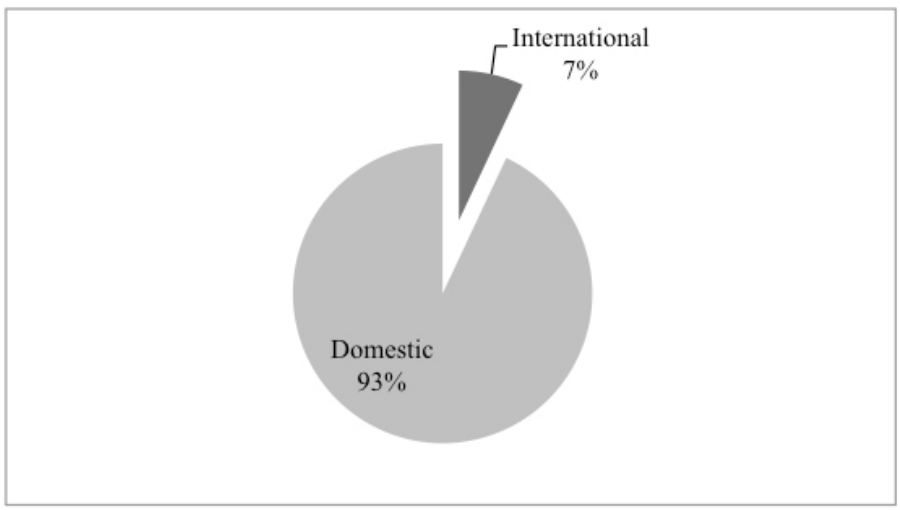


While the long-term trend is positive it does not necessarily mean that destinations will grow at the same rate since competitive dynamics may be different for each.

Approximately 7% of visitors to California are international, however, overall visitation and travel spending continues to increase.

3 Dean Runyan & Associates, "Visit California Economic Impact of Travel 2016" http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Find-Research/California-Statistics-Trends

2015 Total California Travel Visitors



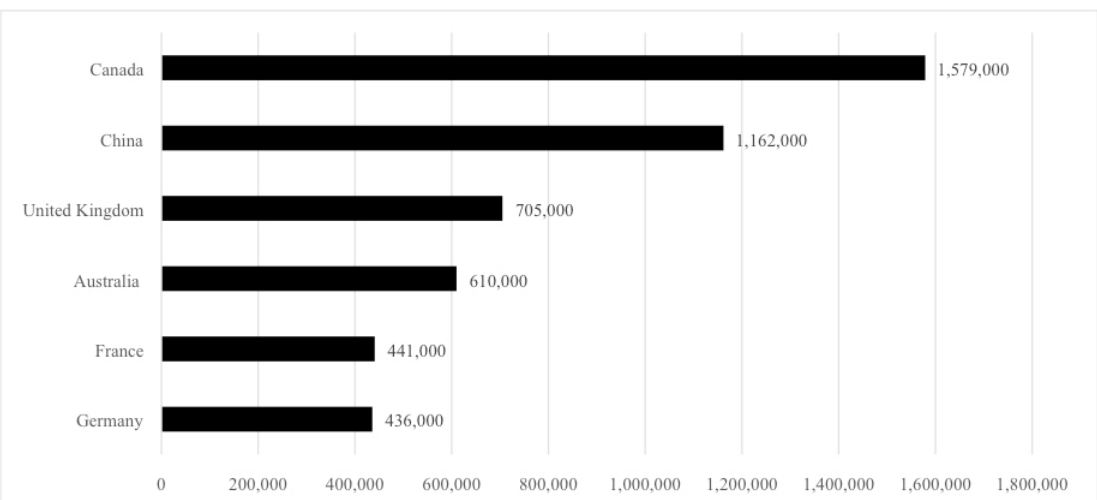
Source: California Travel Outlook 2015

International

Given Mendocino County's unique assets and proximity to San Francisco, **cooperative efforts should focus on attracting a share of international visitors,** which should continue to grow over time. Primary international visitation data by markets of importance to Mendocino can be found below.

Selected International Market Visitors to California Annually

Source: Visit California 2015 Global Tourism Statistics

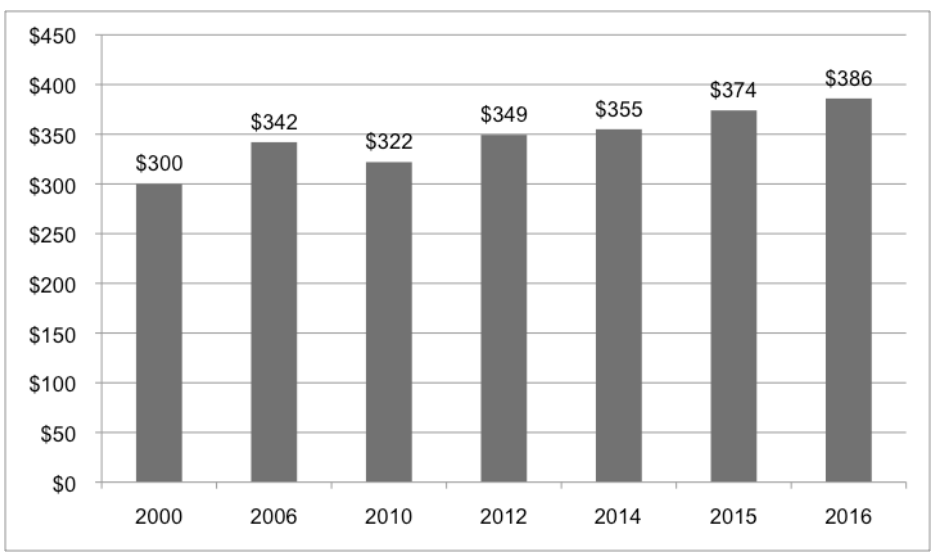


2: the Mendocino County market

A. Size and Scope of the Mendocino County Market in Perspective

Within the State of California, **Mendocino County as a whole generates approximately $374 million in travel spending**[4]. The 2000 through 2016 trend is found below.

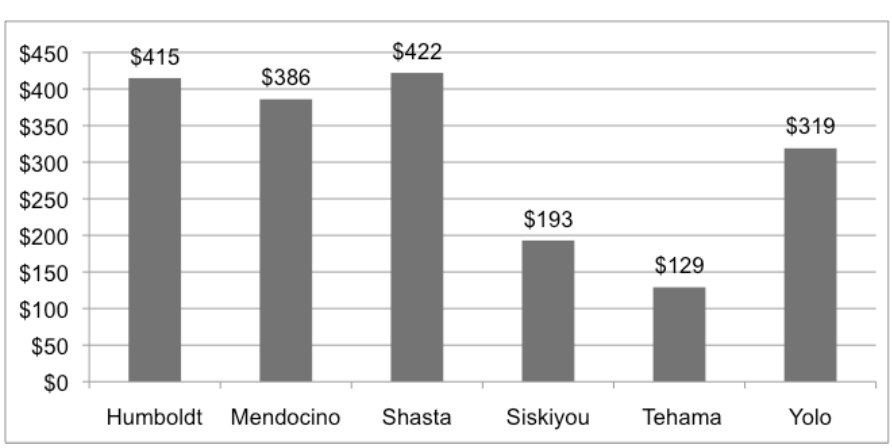
Mendocino County Visitor Spending 2000-2016 ($ Millions)



Source: California Travel Impacts by County, March 2017

In terms of overall tourism spending, as compared to neighboring counties, Mendocino and Humboldt counties are ranked closely but behind Shasta County.

Travel Spending By Selected County ($ Millions)

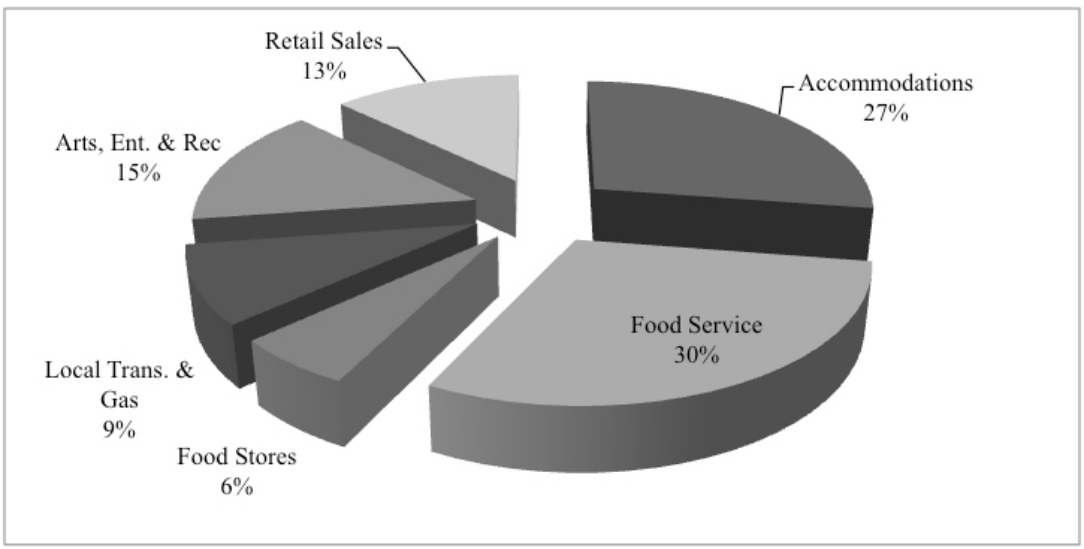


Source: California Travel Impacts by County, 2016

4 California Travel Impacts by County 2016

With regard to how those travel dollars are spent, the figure below identifies travel spending by type of business service. **Note, food service is the largest percentage of visitor spending at 30%**.

Mendocino County Travel Spending by Type of Business Service ($ Millions)



Source: California Travel Impacts by County, 2016

The table below illustrates the share of travel spending among Mendocino County and its key competitors. As can be seen travel spending share has increased for Tehama and Humboldt County and remain constant for other counties.

County	2004 Spending ($ Millions)	%	2014 Spending ($ Millions)	%	2016 Spending ($ Millions)	%
Humboldt	$290	23.35%	$378	25.1%	$415	26.0%
Mendocino	$310	24.96%	$354	23.5%	$386	24.2%
Shasta	$340	27.38%	$410	27.2%	$422	26.4%
Siskiyou	$160	12.88%	$185	12.3%	$192	12.0%
Tehama	$94	7.57%	$128	8.5%	$129	8.1%
Yolo	$52	41.7%	$87.6	5.7%	$86.2	5.3%
Total	**$1,246**	**100%**	**$1,542.6**	**100%**	**$1,630**	**100%**

Source: California Travel Impacts by County, 2016

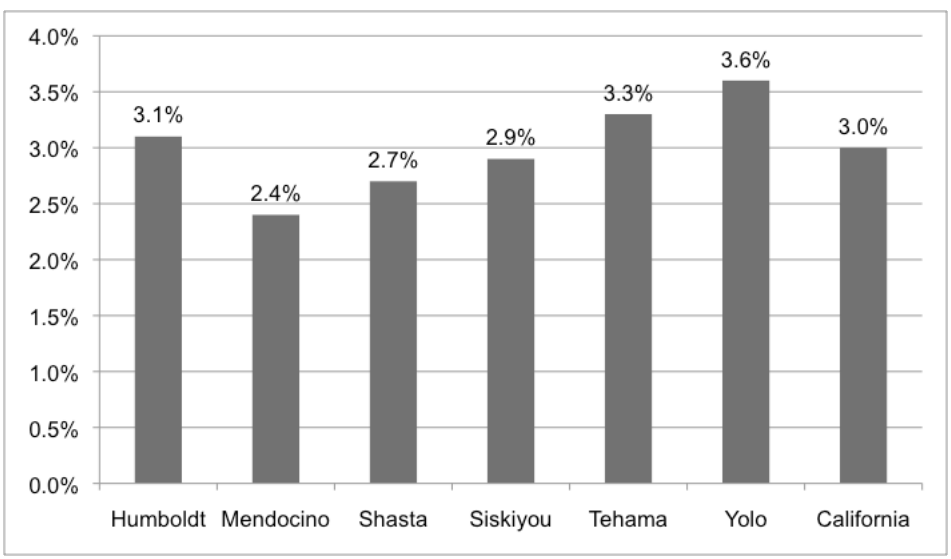
B. Travel Spending Growth Rates

Over the long-term growth during 1992-2016, **travel spending in Mendocino County averaged 2.4% annually**. This average annual growth rate was below most other regional counties as well as below the state average of 4.0%.

1992-2016 Average Annual Travel Spending Growth Rate by Mendocino County, Competitors & State of California[5]

In terms of employment Mendocino County has seen tourism industry employment is at its highest levels with over 6,100 jobs generated by travel spending.

Employment Created by Travel Spending



Source: California Travel Impacts by County, 2016

5 California Travel Impacts by County 1992-2016

destination experience

Spectacular scenery, a sense of isolation, an aesthetic sensibility, and a strong sense of community are the standout highlights of a trip to Mendocino County, an area that is well within a drive of the Bay Area and Sacramento.

No matter where visitors come from, their first impression of Mendocino County is one of outstanding natural beauty: redwood forests and rivers from the north, rolling hills and the promise of the ocean from the east, the blue and gold of distant mountains from the south. This is what we offer… a promise of awe at the foot of a redwood tree, a gasp at the sight of a breaching whale, a sigh of pleasure from a sip of wine hand-crafted from century-old vines… and our welcome.

The county's large geographical area is broadly divided into two separate, yet contiguous, parts: coastal and inland. And those areas are themselves subject to their own geo-partitions: north and south coast; north county, Anderson Valley, and the inland corridor. Each of the two major areas has their distinct attractions for the traveler, yet there are commonalities to be found in fine wining and dining, outdoor recreation, and experiences.

There are myriad reasons why travelers go where they do, and these are almost impossible to quantify. However, what we can offer here is a broad spectrum of what brings visitors to the two major areas of Mendocino County.

Wild and scenic is an understated description of Mendocino County's pristine coastline. From the placid mouth of the Garcia River to the working harbor in Fort Bragg, from the towering mountains of the Lost Coast to the quaint Village of Mendocino, the coastal region invites visitors to become part of the landscape and its history.

The majesty of the redwoods and vistas of lush vineyards are just two of the defining characteristics of inland Mendocino County that attract visitors. With two routes into the heart of the county, travelers can opt to wind along Highway 128 through the Yorkville Highlands to the Anderson Valley, or stay on Highway 101, passing through Hopland to the county's cultural center of Ukiah on to Willits and the forests and wilderness that await at the northern part of the county.

marketing strategy

Given the prominent role that the Internet plays in travel planning, VMC's marketing efforts will continue to drive potential visitors to its website as this is the major tool and asset to learn about Mendocino County.

Marketing efforts (digital advertising, public relations, sales, etc.) are used to create awareness and attract target market segments to visit www.visitmendocino.com and increase the existing database for future tourism marketing efforts. Once the target segment is attracted, they either show interest (go to the website) or not. Once they go to the website, it is important for the site to effectively influence consumers to visit the destination.

Based upon their experience, new visitors either become repeat visitors going back to the lodging property/attraction directly, or back to VMC's website to choose another lodging property or attraction.

goals & objectives

Increase overall demand for overnight visitation during key times of the year in an effort to increase revenues, employment and taxes in Mendocino County.

- Position Mendocino County as one of Northern California's premiere destinations.
- Educate consumers on the different coastal and inland experiences that can be found within the county.
- Maintain marketing focus to key lifestyle and passion segments including outdoor/recreation, wine, food, family, and romance.
- Maintain the role of technology and digital marketing efforts in order to broaden the reach and increase effectiveness.
- Continue implementation of a marketing dashboard that tracks VMC's marketing efforts, successes and shortfalls, and distribute that information in an effort to educate and support partners within the tourism industry and the general public.
- Continue research that tracks the effectiveness of the VMC website and the influence it has on persuading visitors to visit Mendocino County.
- Develop and implement board education and training as policymakers and advocates of the county's travel industry.

target markets

From a psychographic perspective, Mendocino County appeals to the individual who appreciates its natural beauty and wants to participate in outdoor and cultural activities while at the same time enjoying the food and wine the area has to offer.

Domestic Targets

Demographic

- Primary: Millennial Market, Gen-Xers
- Secondary: Baby Boomers/Time Affluent Market
- HHI: $100k+

Geographic

- Primary: State of California (nearly 80% of U.S. market)
- Secondary: U.S., key fly/drive markets: Oregon, Arizona, Nevada, Washington
- Tertiary: Western Canada, International, U.K.

International Targets

- Age: 35-65
- HHI: $150,000
- Traveling for leisure
- Primary access through San Francisco working with the North Coast Tourism Council, Visit San Francisco, and Visit California

market insights

Challenges

Despite Mendocino County's numerous natural assets, rich artistic heritage and evolving culinary prowess, its brand and image remains challenged. Lack of direct air service coupled with a tenuous yet stunning auto route continue to present a two-edged sword for prospective travelers who may opt for a getaway that is perceived as more accessible. This is especially challenging during the winter months—a key need season.

While the region's remote location is also an astonishing asset, Mendocino County's competitive set—Carmel/Big Sur, Santa Barbara, Napa/Sonoma, etc.—continue to raise the bar for the coveted California travel dollar underscoring an even greater need to 1) incent travel to Mendocino County, and 2) convert ambassadors/social influencers to carry the Mendocino message. Unique to the region is its abundance of off-grid cottages, prime Pacific inns, and unique mix of ranches, resorts and B&BS, all backed with an eco-bent that is natural, not manufactured. Mendocino County's ability to stay ahead of the curve requires a strong marketing campaign with PR backbone.

opportunities

Just 150 miles south is Mendocino County's key feeder market: the San Francisco Bay Area. A snapshot of that demographic points to both Millennial and Gen-X and Y social influencers steeped in digital media. This growing sector, along with the under-acknowledged time-and-money-flush Baby Boomers, are both focused on authentic getaways, welltality, green-focused lodging and cutting edge culinary options.

Mendocino County's top opportunity continues to be this ever-evolving market as well as our long-time repeat visitors. The second revenue sector yet to be fully tapped is the "small" meetings/executive retreats/bridal markets, given the wealth of facilities, top-line breakout options and romantic locales. Creating an economic driver for the Mendocino County product requires continued branding/PR efforts designed to cultivate new ambassadors to ensure the long-term longevity of its stakeholders.

growth

All economic indicators point to a positive shift in tourism as the Mendocino County economy continues to stabilize and travelers take to the road in 2017/2018. Both occupancy and ADR are projected to show positive growth in Northern California but tinged with a touch of caution. As more counties trend toward the BID/TBID process for marketing revenue, destinations are challenged to pull out their "A" game—especially within the competitive California market. Add to this a projected boom in international travel—particularly from Canada, China, Mexico and the United Kingdom—and the time to raise the stakes is now.

The best organization to create awareness and brand positioning and influence visitors to choose Mendocino County is Visit Mendocino County.

The best organization to book a room or make a sale is a lodging property or an online travel agency (OTA). Retail agents and tour operators will continue to have a role in certain markets.

action plans

For the 2017/18 fiscal year, it's both prudent and necessary that Visit Mendocino County analyze and review current marketing and public relations trends. With the increasing use of mobile and wearable technology, VMC must be poised to respond to opportunities with agility.

public relations

Without doubt, the PR arm of VMC has a proven track record of success with a continuing upward swell in FAM visit-generated media as well as opportunistic media stories. The organization has contracted with KOLI Communications since 2013, with each year producing greater ROI in terms of advertising equivalency, articles produced by visiting media, and familiarization visits by top-level writers. PR used advertising equivalency (or media cost) and impressions to measure success; the former represents the amount of money that would be spent on advertising covering the same amount of space in a print publication, each of whom have differing advertising rates. Impressions mean the number of views an article in a publication is estimated to have.

The table below illustrates ad equivalency and impressions for PR-generated stories (in response to press releases, familiarization trips by media, hot sheets, trade show contacts, etc.) and those stories that appear without PR intervention e.g., the writer might have visited on vacation. Data is for September 2016 through March 2017.

Month	PR generated		Opportunistic	
	Ad equivalency	Impressions	Ad equivalency	Impressions
March	$1,230,688	25,699,232	$297,926	43,975,510
February	$23,061,350	73,539,542	$916,397	510,967,571
January	$136,312,855	27,974,844	$445,123	17,422,862
December	$234,069	6,094,751	$86,309	2,351,147
November	$2,368,116	31,673,080	$136,943	4,863,791
October	$728,548	44,128,090	$1,258,780	18,332,852
September	$710,186	16,802,217	$248,278	3,559,075

PR Work Plan

Five Easy Pieces

Working with VMC, KOLI Communications will underscore the marketing campaign with a focus on these **five key steps**:

- **Drive Discovery** by leveraging momentum, expanding perception and giving visitors a reason to visit
- **Ignite Advocates** by finding points of passion and igniting incentive to seek them out (arts, culture, culinary)
- **Cultivate a Culture** through attracting the right audience that appreciates the VMC brand and can influence the destination's evolution through word of mouth to key influencers
- **Convert Visitors** by delivering a brand alternative for visitorship (emotionally and financially)
- **Increase Occupancy** is the end result and equalizer for retaining and growing market share

Program Objectives

Drive overnight visitation throughout Mendocino County via the following top tier objectives:

- Assist VMC in promoting a sustainable, clarified image/brand as a premier California destination
- Stimulate demand/increase tourism revenue during critical shoulder seasons
- Initiate awareness among key market niches and lifestyle/passion segments to buoy off-season revenue
- Cultivate collaborative industry relationships to ensure successful, cost-effective and equitable coverage of Mendocino County stakeholders and stretch VMC's budget

Strategies

- Influence the influencers/drive media coverage via multiple venues/channels (traditional/emerging)
- Ignite media interest via proactive campaigns focused on print, television, social media/key influencers
- Leverage and create "news" value as an economic driver for visitation
- Convert customers predisposed to California getaways by differentiating Mendocino County via focusing on distinct benefits/unique assets
- Strengthen industry partnerships with Visit California, North Coast Tourism Council, San Francisco Travel, BrandUSA, etc., via cooperative programming

Core Program

Media Relations Campaign

Drive awareness and brand messaging with a focus on need seasons via creation and distribution of timely/newsworthy materials targeted to key niches. Passion/Lifestyle segments: authentic escapes, off-grid experiences, food & wine, arts & culture, eco-getaways, annual events, family, and romance.

Communications Platforms

Create motivators for campaign outreach, editorial content, pitching and market visitation.

Media Missions/In-Market Editorial Appointments

Maximize external communications via editorial missions in key media-rich markets.

Media Familiarization/Social Influencer Program

Pitch/secure in-market media visits to generate editorial coverage, further brand messaging/positioning within key lifestyle/passion segments

Trade Shows

Attend targeted media trade shows to boost VMC media visibility and secure future media visits.

Community Relations

- Maintain VMC's credibility in the local media landscape; augment internal program to assist in positioning as the leader in tourism marketing.
- Assist VMC in maintaining visibility; broaden stakeholder support
- Continue to partner in development of stakeholder relations and promotional programs

Promotions

Dovetail VMC strategic promotions and/or in-market events tied to VMC's overall branding to boost revenue during critical off seasons.

Digital Footprint/Social Media

Augment in-house social media campaign to extend VMC's digital footprint; dovetail social media marketing promotions with publicity support; coordinate efforts with in-house staff.

Programming

Provide ongoing counsel/insight on market developments and opportunities.

Measured Outcomes

- Realize $4.6 million in advertising equivalency
- Secure 300 qualified media placements
- Reach an estimated 110 million potential visitors/circulation
- Secure 18-20 individual media visits for the calendar year
- Draft/distribute 10 releases annually
- Attend 2 industry trade shows
- Conduct 1 media mission

Total PR investment: $299,000

advertising & marketing

For the coming fiscal year, VMC will work closely with TheorySF (TSF), a San Francisco-based marketing company, on the overall strategy for raising awareness of Mendocino County as a tourist destination and developing marketing campaigns that will take advantage of the area's natural beauty and resources to entice visitation to visitmendocino.com and to the destination itself.

TheorySF was engaged in early 2017 to assist VMC with the development of a brand refresh and an alignment of marketing strategies. Between March and June 2017, TSF has undertaken interviews with key stakeholders and Board members in Mendocino County, held visitor intercept studies around the county, and conducted an awareness and platform study with 1,000 Millennials and Gen-Xers throughout the state. The results of the research indicate that unaided awareness about Mendocino County as a "getaway" is very low, with other Northern California destinations more top of mind among this cohort. The study went on to ask those who had heard of Mendocino County the activities or words associated with it. The results are shown in the word cloud below.

The next question asked participants to select the word or phrase that best indicated to them what a visit to Mendocino County means. An overwhelming majority selected the phrase "Find Your Happy." This tagline was accepted by the Marketing Committee on May 8, 2017 and recommended to the MCTC Board, which approved its use on May 16. Based on this selection, TheorySF is working on a creative campaign to capture the essence of the phrase. This campaign will affect all marketing materials and will be used to create a new look and feel for the VMC website.

Scope of Work

A comprehensive marketing campaign that will attract Millennials and Gen-Xers, and to a lesser extent, Boomers to access VisitMendocino.com and convert website visitations into destination visitations.

Potential initiatives to include:

- Content marketing
- High-quality, inspirational videos
- User-generated content to be included on rework of VMC website
- Targeted appeals to Millennials and Gen-Xers via social media channels
- Transit and/or billboard media
- Continue to update image library
- Collect and analyze data to inform marketing efforts
- For each marketing program launched, establish metrics against which ROI can be measured

Measured Outcome

Increase unaided awareness of Mendocino County in a comparative study

Total advertising & marketing investment: $381,000

website & social media

VisitMendocino.com is VMC's primary source of distributing information about Mendocino County online and is the heartbeat of all of VMC's efforts. During FY 2017–18, VMC will work with TheorySF and Brandhound to:

- Consult with TheorySF regarding the VMC website and the depth of changes necessary to attract more site visitation and conversions of actual visitors to the county; the recommendation may be to redo the site with a new theme and enhanced user interface or to refresh the existing site
- Ensure SEO is fully implemented across the site
- Keep WordPress up to date, refresh themes and plug-ins as necessary
- Implement enhanced Google Analytics reporting in order to drill down on marketing ad words, referrals
- Implement user-generated content on the site for enhanced site visitor experience
- Include short videos on a regular basis
- Create rich editorial content with engaging imagery in the form of blogs

Social Media

Social media continues to grow in importance as a motivator for travel, spanning all demographics. People look to their friends and family for recommendations on travel destinations—increasingly more often than traditional media and advertising. Our social presence seeks not only to directly engage new potential visitors and remind previous visitors of the destination but also to excite our core visitor to share and spread the word about Mendocino County. To that end we will engage with key content producers via Instagram to generate dynamic, sticky visual content, with the aim of increasing overall reach.

Measured Outcomes

Total Facebook Fan Base: 65,000; Total Instagram Followers: 8,500

Total website & interactive media investment: $59,000

sales

Sales is yet another spoke in the VMC promotion wheel, working to create a coordinated approach to put Mendocino County in the minds of travelers, inspire them to visit, and show them what they can do once here. Our research-based sales efforts rely heavily on Visit California's extensive research and programs, but in the coming year will also incorporate research generated by Theory SF and other sources such as Destination Analysts.

Our group and international sales are conducted as part of our partnership with the North Coast Tourism Council. The San Francisco Bay area, including Oakland and San Jose, is VMC's number one target market, with Sacramento and the Central

Valley in the number two spot. Significant business also comes from the Los Angeles area, Portland, Seattle, and Reno. On the international front, Canada is easily number one with Germany, the U.K., Mexico, Japan, France, and Australia in the top tier.

For FY 2017/18, the integrated sales approach will include:

Consumer Trade Shows The best way to contact thousands of potential visitors is to meet them personally at trade shows. We promote the county by handing out logoed green bags and promotional literature. We partner with local businesses by giving them an opportunity to participate directly by attending or indirectly, by offering giveaways. The typical show yields about 2,000 new names for our database, people who will receive newsletters reminding them to keep Mendocino County in their vacation plans. Though the locations vary, as we try to cover as much geographic territory as possible with limited resources, we always attend the Bay Area Travel and Adventure Show in Santa Clara and Sunset Celebration Weekend in Sonoma. In Southern California, we alternate travel shows annually between San Diego and Los Angeles. We also do niche marketing by attending pet, bridal and outdoor events. Every year we evaluate our activities and try to add something new to the mix to broaden our reach.

Regional partnerships We partner and coordinate with other DMOs in the northern California area. We have developed a regional beer trail for example. Partners include San Francisco Travel, Sacramento Convention and Visitors Bureau, Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association, Southern OR Travel, and the DMOs in San Mateo, Oakland, Marin, Sonoma, Humboldt, Lake, and Del Norte Counties. We find many prospective travelers want to come to the redwoods, or the coast and don't know where Mendocino begins and ends. By working with regional partners and creating regional itineraries, we make sure we are in the conversation concerning northern California travel plans.

FAM (Familiarization) Tours We make a concerted effort to influence travel professionals who in turn influence and book travelers: travel agents, receptives and tour operators and, to some extent, Online Travel Agencies. FAM participants are either domestic or international. They create packages and promotions that include Mendocino County as a result of their hotel site visits and overnight stays. Visits by groups of tour operators from Japan, Korea, the UK and France have all resulted in the creation of new packages which include Mendocino. We also host domestic FAMs and arrange site visits with local hotels.

North Coast Tourism Council (NCTC) VMC benefits from its chairmanship of NCTC, one of the eight rural regions designated by Visit California. The NCTC budget is for international sales efforts and is totally funded by Visit California with various matches. This enables VMC to have a presence at such important venues as the annual IPW trade show.

Group Sales The sales team attends events such as the American Bus Association and the National Tour Association in an attempt to obtain group business. We also work closely with tour operators to encourage groups to overnight in the county. Our efforts have resulted in groups originating in Los Angeles, Sacramento and Canada coming to the county.

Hotel Contracts The desired end result of group sales and our international efforts are hotel contracts. One of the main ways to obtain sales continuity and volume is to be the matchmaker between tour operators and local hotels. If the two

enter into a contract, there is a likelihood of steady business. There are at least 30 such contracts in place. One local hotel with contracts with several receptives reported more than 125 room nights booked in a six-month period. Many of the bookings are planned further in advance, thus providing predictability to the hotels.

For FY 2017/2018, VMC's sales goals are to:

- Book 5 new meetings in County
- Increase international visitation in terms of dollars spent by 6% to 8%
- Facilitate 10 new contracts between County hotels and receptives
- Promote Mendocino County to 1,000 retail travel professionals
- Promote Mendocino County to 150 tour operators, receptives and OTAs
- Promote Mendocino County to 10-20 international media
- Promote Mendocino County to all 14 international offices of Visit California
- Conduct 8 FAMs
- Attend 6 consumer trade shows
- Add 10,000 names to our consumer data base
- Facilitate the creation of 10 new packages which include Mendocino County

Total sales investment: $95,500

visitor services

Getting visitors to come to the county is only part of the equation. The other part of the effort is to have them return for multiple nights and encourage them to extend their stays.

While VMC's primary responsibility is to encourage visitation, a secondary task is to support visitors while they are here. Support includes providing various visitor centers with collateral such as wine maps, tear off maps and information about attractions. We also staff a visitor center in Fort Bragg and provide matching funds to the Redwood Coast Chamber of Commerce so their visitor center can remain open.

Goals for FY 2017/2018 are to:

- Complete and distribute new tear-off maps for both Willits and Ukiah (100,000 for each city) to area hotels and businesses

- Continue to distribute North and South Coast tear-off maps
- Investigate placement of a third gateway sign on Highway 128
- Distribute festival guides and other festival collateral
- Provide10,000 updated visitor guides to out-of-county locations
- Begin updating the popular Mendocino County pet guide and continue distribution
- Dissemination of the mini visitor guide at events
- Participate in various in-county mixers, festivals and events
- Assist in driving website visitation and increasing unique visitors.

Total visitor services investment: $95,500

festivals & events

Unique and interesting festivals and events are a key component for the traveler's potential choice of Mendocino County over other destinations. While tourism to the county is robust during certain times of year, there are months it is not. To remedy this, VMC sponsors three umbrella festivals per year: Crab, Wine & Beer in January (now in its 19th year), Mushroom, Wine & Beer in November (now in its 18th year), and starting in April 2017 the Almost Fringe Festival. (This last festival replaced the Party for the Planet which had been in existence for five years.)

As with most established events, there are benefits like name recognition and devoted following; and challenges like theme-fatigue and competition from events in other destinations. In order to keep our existing audience engaged and attract new attendees, the Festival Committee is exploring new facets of the county to offer, for example, changing the theme of the April festival to art and creativity, something Mendocino County has an abundance of and prides itself on. In addition, the committee is examining the two other festivals to find opportunities to enhance and keep them relevant.

Fiscal year 2017/2018 goals are to:

- Build upon and enhance existing post-festival survey methods to gauge stakeholders' experience by using quantifiable criteria that can be used for yearly comparison purposes.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to create unique signature events supported by a variety of tangential offerings whose goal is increasing attendance by visitors and participation by partners at existing festivals and events.
- Develop a new signature event for the Mushroom, Wine & Beer Festival.
- Continue to encourage lodging owners to offer incentives for extended stays during festivals. Such incentives can include room specials or discounts, value added deals that provide tickets to festival events, or discounts to

local restaurants and spa packages. Lodging providers will be encouraged to create offerings that best suit their brands and their clientele.

- Work with local non-profits and wine regions to encourage larger tourist attracting events such as Mendocino Coast Hospital Foundation's Winesong and Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association's Pinot Noir Festival.
- Increase partners' buy-in by developing new ideas for festivals and events.
- Work with the Festival Committee to brainstorm ideas for working with partners to create new and exciting festival events that will attract VMC's target audience of Millennials and Gen-Xers.

Festival and events expenses are part of Visitor Services budget.

partner relations

The Strategic Plan references ways that VMC can work with its partners and businesses throughout the county as to the benefits of the tourism industry and its effects on the local economy.

VMC will continue to take the pulse of new tourism-related businesses in the county by email and phone outreach, surveying partner websites, and individual visits, etc.

Goals for 2017/18 include:

- Reinstitution of a monthly Executive Director report sent to partners and posted on the MendocinoTourism.org website
- Quarterly columns in local media regarding tourism and its benefits to the community
- Continue the "hotel adoption program" whereby VMC staff will visit lodging properties to gain a contact, gather information, and learn about the property
- Complete design on partner brochure to help business owners and community members better understand the mission of VMC
- Attend Chambers of Commerce meetings, city promotional meetings, and events to gain and share ideas, and show community support
- Explore and research the future promotion of recreational cannabis use throughout the County and region by being a leading entity to capitalize on this potential new market

Total partner relations investment: $28,000

operations & admin

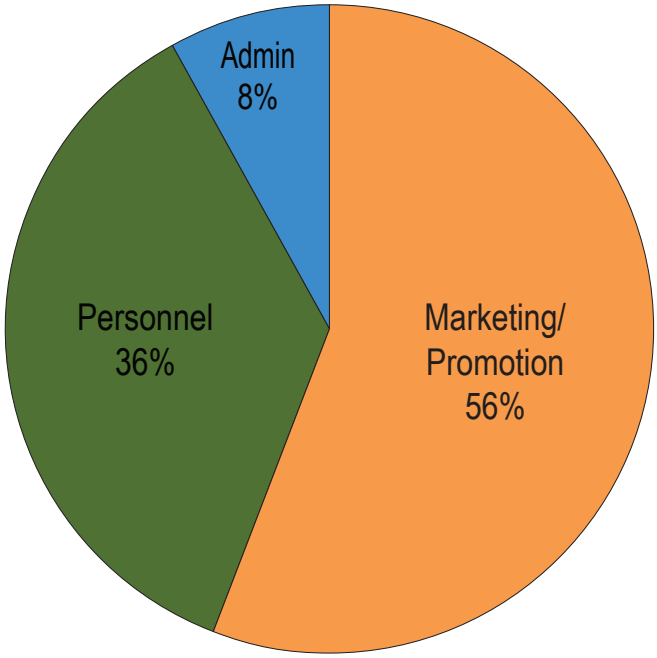
- Operations covers the day-to-day expenses of maintaining VMC as well as the costs of mailings, office space, telephones, newsletters, etc.
- The Fort Bragg office maintains a visitor center that serves the public by providing information, brochures, and assistance, as well as an art exhibit space.
- The office will continue to be open on Saturdays from Memorial Day to Labor Day to provide visitor services; staff will also continue to hold First Fridays events in conjunction with other galleries and businesses in the downtown area to strengthen community relations.
- Review and continue to enhance operational strategies such as telephone systems, conference calls and locations, file sharing, database development, back-up systems.
- Train all staff on website usage and best practices.
- Attend key travel industry conferences to provide access to industry trends and successful examples of best practices, furthering internal knowledge and benefiting the VMC program of work.
- Maintain accreditation from the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program, offered by Destination Marketing Association International.

Total operations and admin investment: $111,200

budget 2017/18

vmc vs. dmo industry average

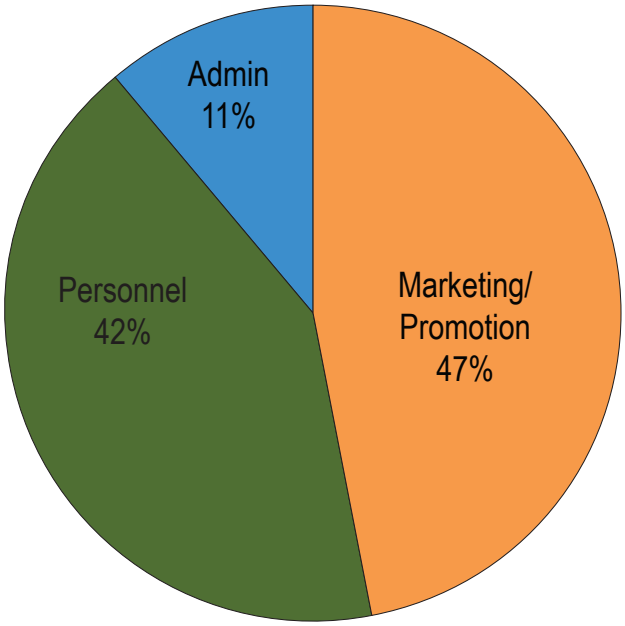
Visit Mendocino County, Inc.
2017-2018 Budget Breakdown



Administration: $92,116 – 8%
Personnel + Independent Contractor: $410,181 – 36%
Marketing/Program Expenses: $638,595 - 56%

Total expenses: $1,140,892

DMO Industry Average
Represented by a sample of DMOs that participated in
DMAI 2015 DMO Organizational & Financial Profile Study



Categories defined as follows:

Administration: office supplies, computer expenses, rent/utilities, interest, etc.
Personnel: salaries & wages, payroll taxes, and employee benefits
Marketing/Promotion: all non-admin and non-personnel expenses

VMC projected budget

INCOME	
MCTC BID Assessment	$886,519
County of Mendocino Matching Funds	430,000
Other income (incl. carryover of $30,477)	57,477
Reserve/Contingency Account	134,700
County Administrative Fee	[26,596]
TOTAL INCOME	**$1,481,700**
EXPENSES	
Advertising/Media	381,000
Marketing/Public Relations	299,000
Website Maintenance & Development	59,000
Leisure & Group Sales	95,500
Visitor Services	95,500
Partnerships	28,000
Administrative Expenses	111,200
Personnel	277,800
Reserve/Contingency Account	134,700
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$1,481,700**

staff & contractors

Executive Director Alan Humason

Office Manager Kathy Chacon

Sales, Hospitality & Events Coordinator Luz Harvey

Tourism Marketing Assistant Vanlee Waters

Marketing & Communications Coordinator Alison de Grassi

Sales Manager Richard Strom

Public Relations KOLI Communications

Marketing TheorySF

Social Media Tony Barthel

Website Maintenance Brandhound Inc.

Bookkeeping Daphne Haney

MCTC board of directors

Chair: John Kuhry, At Large Member

Vice Chair: Sharon Davis, Mendocino Coast Chamber of Commerce/Coastal Regional Promotional Organization Member

Secretary: Jo Bradley, Medium Lodging Operator Member

Treasurer: Marcus Magdaleno, Inland Chamber of Commerce/Inland Regional Promotional Organization Member

Food & Beverage: Cynthia Ariosta

Winery/Winegrower Member: Bernadette Byrne

Coastal Large Lodging Operator Member: Cally Dym

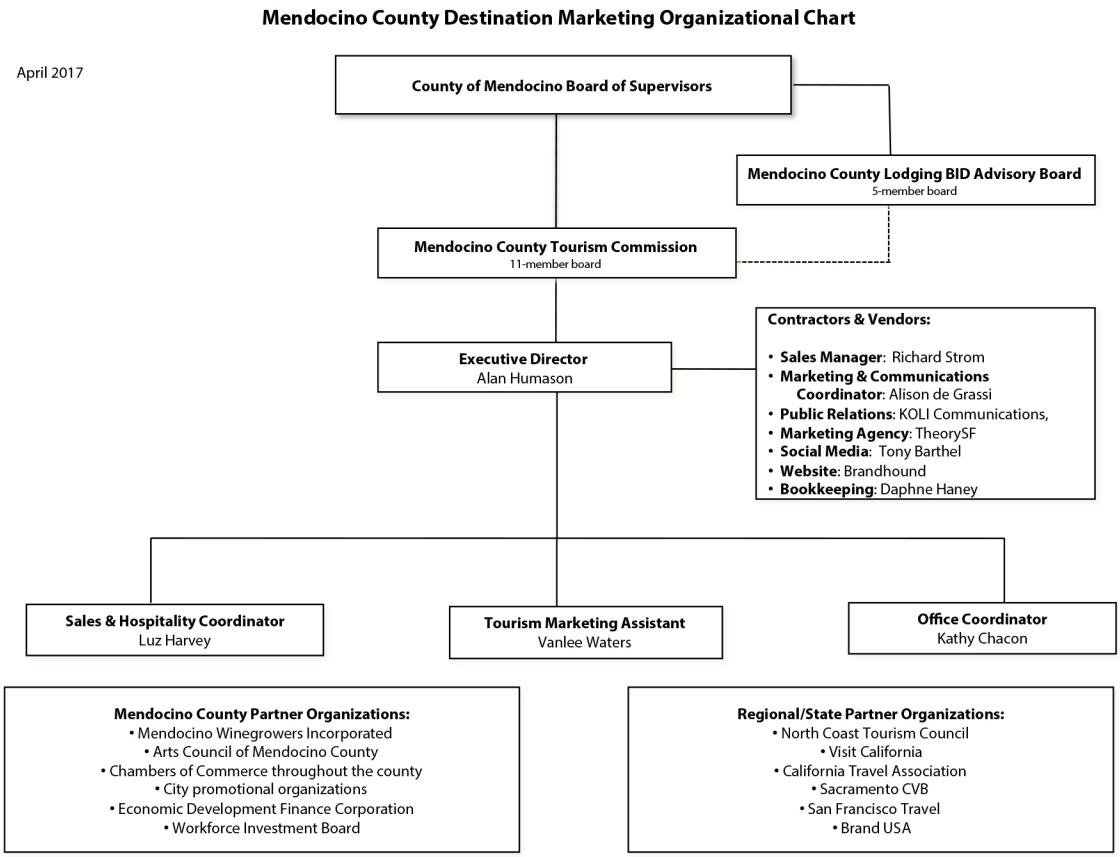
Large Lodging Operator Member: Jitu Ishwar

Small Lodging Operator Member: Deborah Kettner

Inland Large Lodging Operator Member: Jan Rodriguez

Arts Organization/Attractions Member: Jennifer Seward

organization chart



appendix 1

Visit Mendocino County: Strategic Direction 2017/18-2019/20

Clarity

Vision
Enriching experiences for our guests, enhanced lifestyle for our residents, and stability and diversity for our economy

Mission
Visit Mendocino County stewards and amplifies the total Mendocino County experience.

Values
Transparency
We foster trust through openness and integrity.
Accountability
We are outcome-oriented and professional.
Partnership
We create alignment through inclusive and meaningful relationships.
Community
We contribute to the fabric of Mendocino County.
Innovation
Our creativity reflects the uniqueness of our cultures and landscapes.

Reputation
Leader
We motivate and facilitate the tourism community.
Accessible
We welcome—and are responsive to—input from community members and stakeholders.
Collaborative
We actively seek engagement and collaboration with our stakeholders and partners.
Bold
We deliver on smart, effective, and forward-thinking ideas.

Position
In order to support our stakeholders, generate economic activity for county residents through tourism, and inspire our visitors, Visit Mendocino County:
- Consistently markets the entire county and its assets.
- Creates, develops, and manages brand awareness for the county.
- Connects people and organizations to opportunities.
- Provides information to in-county partners and tourism resources to the industry.
- Delivers a robust and sustainable return on investment.

Focus

Imperatives	Objectives
Demonstrate and strengthen VMC's contribution to county economic and community vitality	• Bid assessment growth at 5% over average of top 3 competitors • Year-over-year increase of sales tax receipts in Mendocino County • Year-over-year increase in stakeholder survey response rate
Cultivate VMC's relationships and collaborations	• Year-over-year increase in number of events launched and reaching self-sufficiency • Year-over-year increase in "opportunities" page visitation on VMC website • Year-over-year increase in new applicants for BID and MCTC Board positions and committee membership
Raise awareness of the Mendocino County experience	• Year-over-year increase Mendocino County awareness score • Year-over-year increases in impressions and ad equivalency • Year-over-year increase in experience perception score on in-market visitor survey

Action

Initiatives

- Increase tourism revenue through the development and implementation of the annual integrated marketing, public relations, and sales plan.
- Improve data-driven decision making through increased participation and "buy in" from all of our partners.
- Develop a data-sharing process that offers context and insights for partners.

- Foster collaboration and county-wide alignment by creating and developing the "go to" website for all tourism stakeholders.
- Strengthen regional tourism relationships to leverage broader marketing opportunities.
- Proactively educate and communicate with all tourism stakeholders.

- Increase Mendocino County brand awareness and positive perception.
- Work with partners to develop, promote and grow strong and beneficial tourism activities and events.
- Explore our options to influence and shape potential cannabis tourism.

appendix 2: glossary

This glossary is included to explain terms used in this plan and in other reports and documents issued by Visit Mendocino County. While staff and contractors are familiar with the terminology, some of the terms need a brief explanation.

Advertising equivalency	This dollar figure represents the amount of money it would take to purchase the equivalent in advertising space in a print publication or digital equivalent. The VMC PR team uses a 1:1 ratio unlike many PR firms who use a multiplier to boost numbers.
Impressions	The number of views a print or digital article is estimated to reach based on circulation and subscription data.
Media Placement	A story (print or digital) about an aspect of Mendocino County that arises from PR efforts.
Media Mission	A trip by the PR team to a particular market, e.g., Vancouver BC, to meet local journalists and writers and inspire visitation to and coverage of Mendocino County.
Releases	This can either refer to a press release or a "hot sheet," which is distributed to the press and highlights new and upcoming businesses and openings in the county.
FAM	Familiarization tour or trip. Media FAMs involve members of the media who are vetted by the PR team prior to a visit. Sales FAMs apply to tour group operators who are visiting the county with the aim of including Mendocino in tour packages.
Millennials	The segment of the population born between the early and the mid-1990s to early 2000s. Also known as Generation Y, they are the children of baby boomers and older Gen Xers.
Gen-Xers	The population segment born between the early-to-mid 1960s and ending birth years ranging from the late 1970s to early 1980s. Children of the Baby Boomers.
Baby Boomers	Those born btween the early-to-mid 1940s up to about 1964.
Content marketing	Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.
Google Analytics	A reporting tool provided by Google that can be used to analyze traffic, ad words, digital marketing campaigns, demographics, etc. for VisitMendocino.com.