

# Bryan County

## Tourism Development Plan



# 2021 Bryan County Tourism Assessment

## INTRODUCTION

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The Bryan County Tourism Assessment is a roadmap to help move Bryan County forward over the next five years and to harness its true tourism potential. The Chickasaw Country team was tasked with evaluating the current state of tourism assets, the untapped tourism resources and what tourism resources are needed to increase visitation within the county. This was accomplished by working with the major stakeholders of the county. The list of stakeholders includes cities, Chambers, DMO's, educational facilities and local businesses.

Chickasaw Country is a destination marketing organization, within the Chickasaw Nation Department of Commerce, promoting both Chickasaw-owned and non-Chickasaw tourism assets within the 13 counties in south-central Oklahoma known as the Chickasaw Nation. Chickasaw Country promotes tourism to local, regional, national and international visitors in hopes of generating exposure, garnering interest and driving visits to the region.

This assessment – and the related goals and strategies – is the result of the Chickasaw Country team's extensive conversation with stakeholders and Bryan County leadership. The planning process used to develop this final document was open and transparent, with stakeholders encouraged to provide both positive and negative feedback about the current state of tourism within their region.

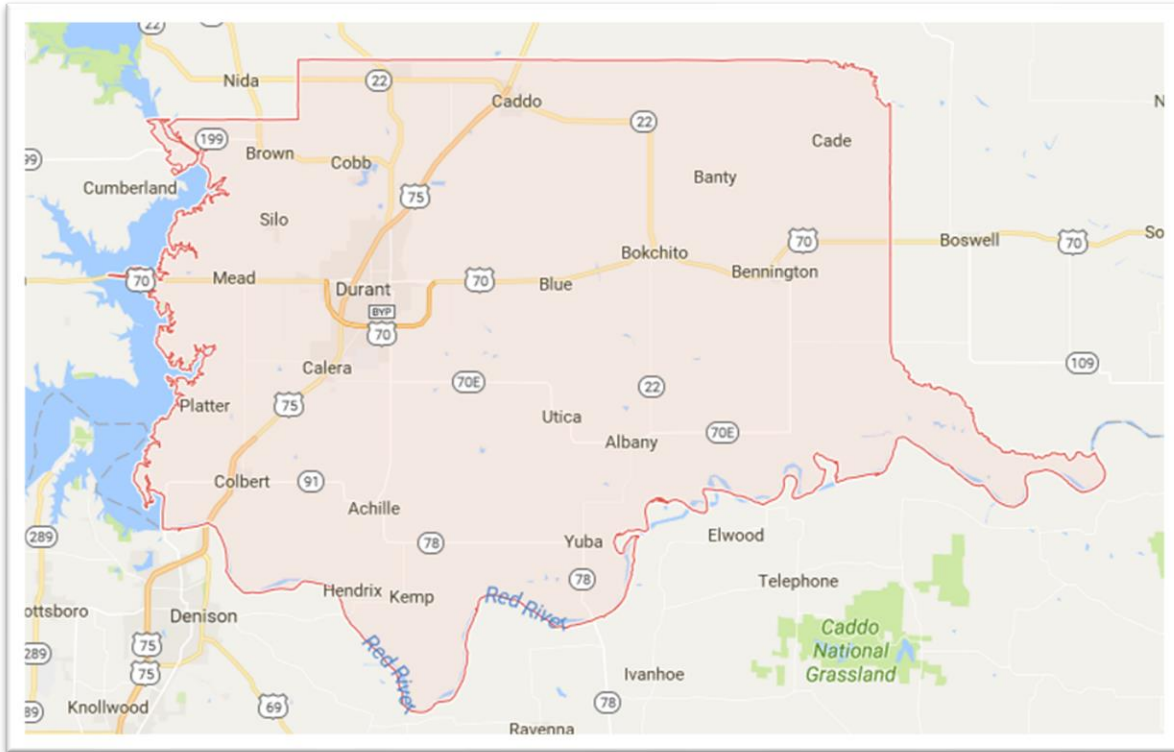
It is important to highlight that the plan was developed during an economically challenging time, for Bryan County and stakeholders within both the public and private sectors. To help anticipate financial and time commitments required in implementation, the plan includes recommended phasing. Strategies in the early years are intended to ensure a smooth transition towards the fulfillment of this newly focused tourism strategy.

The factors outlined below are important in context to the plan and its strategic direction. These factors include a snapshot of the current Bryan County tourism industry, prioritization of overnight visitors versus day trippers, the role of tourism in economic development, the characteristics of a highly functioning tourism system and the value of diverse assets.

### County Snapshot

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As part of the Bryan County Tourism Assessment, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Bryan County. The Dean Runyan Associates data indicates that Bryan County employed 3,380 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$364.6 million in visitor spending <sup>[1]</sup>. This assessment seeks to continue the growth of the county's tourism industry by building upon its current strengths and potential tourism assets.



*This image represents a map of Bryan County <sup>[4]</sup>*

**Current County Population: 47,995 (2019) <sup>[3]</sup>**

- Age 0-5            6.5%
- Age 6-18        23.3%
- Age 19-64      52.2%
- Ages 65+        18%
  
- Female            51.2%
- Male              48.8%

**Current County Unemployment Rate: <sup>[5]</sup>**

- April 2021      3.5%
- April 2020      10.3%
- April 2019      2.5%

**Cities with Tourism Product:**

- Durant
- Caddo
- Mead
- Colbert
- Bokchito

**Current Economic Resources: <sup>[1-16]</sup>**

- Agriculture
- Manufacturing
- Distribution
- Gaming
- Lake Texoma
- Lake Durant
- University/college
- Medical centers
- Schools/education
- Annual community events
- Main Street shopping
- Wildlife refuge

**Current Tourism Related Organizations: <sup>[6-16]</sup>**

- Chickasaw Country, LLC
- Choctaw Country, Inc.
- Main Street Organizations
- Durant Chamber of Commerce
- Chickasaw Country Marketing Association
- Lake Texoma Association

## Overnight Spending

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This assessment addresses leisure, business and event-based visitors who come from outside of the county. Visitors may come from a nearby county, surrounding states or internationally. Their stay may range from a few hours to a few days per visit. According to 2018 Dean Runyan Associates data, the average overnight spend per person in Bryan County is \$163 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$377.

Because of the significant difference in the economic value of an overnight visitor versus a multiple night visitor, the ultimate focus of this plan is to generate additional overnight stays, and encourage travelers to stay longer, experience more and return to Bryan County.

Much of the plan focuses on cross-promotion between experiences. It creates compelling, yet convenient, ways for visitors to see more than the main attractions that inspired their visit. This portion of the plan also serves to strengthen attractions for day travelers visiting Bryan County.

## Tourism is Economic Development

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Tourism is the third economic driver for the state of Oklahoma creating 103,600 jobs in 2018. Domestic and international travelers to Oklahoma spent \$9.6 billion in 2018 and generated \$1.1 billion to federal, state and local governments. The tourism industry in Bryan County represented approximately 13.1% of the county's total employment in 2018 and paid more than \$96.56 million in total wages in 2018<sup>[1]</sup>. Tourism jobs are valuable because they provide employment opportunities for a multitude of people. Some will advance up the career ladder in tourism, moving from entry-level service positions to higher-paying jobs while others will build on the skills and experience they gain in the tourism sector to branch out into other sectors.

Tourism brings in monetary funds that would otherwise never enter the local economy. In Bryan County, visitors who spend money at tourist attractions, restaurants, overnight accommodations, gas stations and other related suppliers of tourism-related goods or services bring new currency to the area. Many of these funds get circulated within Bryan County's economy, leading to additional jobs and income for residents. Many tourism investments work to attract and serve visitors while contributing to the quality of life for Bryan County residents.

## Highly Functioning Tourism System

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The assessment builds on the successes of previous tourism efforts put forth by the stakeholders within Bryan County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Bryan County. As a result of this planned approach, Bryan County is expected to grow as a highly functioning tourism system. At the end of 2021 or five years (2026) the tourism system should include:

- Strong assets that attract visitors to Bryan County and encourage them to stay longer, explore more, and return often.
- Create/Update the county's brand or image that builds on its strengths in a genuine and powerful way.
- Effectively market and promote the county's tourism efforts by cross-promotion.
- Strong supporting infrastructure and services, including overnight accommodations, restaurants and signage.

- A collaborative and coordinated network of partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors working together to strengthen the county's tourism market for the benefit of all.

## **STRATEGIC APPROACH**

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The strategic approach and foundational direction for this county's assessment is to focus visitor attention toward the anchor clusters and anchor attractions while simultaneously working to enhance and extend the visitor experience through sustaining clusters and sustaining assets.

The strategic approach begins with performing a SWOT Analysis of the county's current tourism climate. Bryan County focuses promotional efforts around current strengths and opportunities of the county and establish goals and strategies to overcome weaknesses and threats. By performing this analysis, we are able to identify anchor clusters and anchor attractions within the county. The promotion of anchor and sustaining clusters is aided by cooperative marketing, maps, tourism packages, promotions, signage and technology-guided tourism. To support this approach, the plan outlines the need for an improved tourism infrastructure and refined tourism funding.

## **SWOT Analysis**

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As a Destination Marketing Organization, Chickasaw Country does not own all of the tourism assets within Chickasaw Country. It is vital that Chickasaw Country portrays realistic expectations on what this region has to offer which is why it is important for us to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting our ability to attract visitors.

### **Strengths:**

- Nearby land, rivers, lakes
- Camping, hunting and fishing
- Rural, undeveloped land
- Annual events
- Southeastern Oklahoma State University
- Authentic atmosphere
- Well-developed Main Street
- Gaming/Entertainment
- Choctaw History
- Proximity to US 69
- 90 miles North of Dallas
- 150 miles Southeast of Oklahoma City

### **Weaknesses:**

- Limited lake accommodations
- Limited night life

### **Opportunities:**

- Opportunity for additional community events and organizations
- Bryan County partnership with Southeastern Oklahoma State University
- Undeveloped land
- Lake Texoma, Lake Murray and Arbuckle Mountains are within an hour away
- History of Indian Territory available in this area
- History throughout towns of Bryan County

Threats:


- Weather
- Gaming Competition

Anchor & Sustaining Descriptions

**Anchor clusters and anchor attractions** were identified by the Chickasaw Country team through stakeholder interviews. These meetings and interviews revealed assets for which Bryan County is best known as well as the most popular tourism draws. The Chickasaw Country team defines anchor clusters and attractions as those strong enough to attract large numbers of visitors from outside the county and those with built-in marketing infrastructure programs.

The list of anchor clusters includes:

- Tribal Assets:
  - Fort Washita
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - Main Street Shopping & Boutiques
  - Southeastern Oklahoma State University
  - Blue River
  - Lake Texoma
  - Fort Washita
  - Red River
  - Washita River
  - Choctaw Casino Resort
  - Choctaw Welcome Center
  - Choctaw RV Park
  - Three Valley Museum



Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	0	0%	0%	\$0.00
Cabins & Lodging	40	93%	65%	\$184.00
RV's & Campgrounds	159	84%	68%	\$60.50

\* Data collected as of July 2021 <sup>[17-22]</sup>

\*\* Data provided includes only those accommodations falling within the boundaries of Chickasaw Country

**Sustaining clusters and sustaining assets** constitute additional places to visit, experience and engage within the community. These clusters are the reason to stay longer, explore off the beaten path and experience local living. The sustaining assets can be even stronger than its anchor assets that do not currently have the drawing power to get visitors to Bryan County on their own. However, a few of the clusters and attractions listed as sustaining in this plan may evolve into future anchor attractions as they draw more attention and their marketing efforts grow.

The list of sustaining clusters includes:

- Tribal Assets:
  - N/A
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - Agri-tourism related destinations (seasonal)
  - Hunting, fishing, and camping
  - Land, Rivers, and Lakes nearby
  - Atmosphere
  - Main street shopping
  - Southeastern Oklahoma State University and athletic events
  - Bryan County Events

### Hidden Assets Identified

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**Hidden Assets** were the third category of tourism assets identified in the strategic approach. Hidden assets are not well known and are closely connected with community life. The Chickasaw Country team identified places, people, culture and activities a tourist would consider ‘authentic’ and allow them the “live like a local.”

Through the hidden asset analysis, the Chickasaw Country team identified three (3) “new” assets. The analysis revealed a number of cultural, natural resource and sustainability events that would never surface through a conventional tourism assessment. The integration of these hidden assets with the more significant attractions and assets has many benefits. Beyond building respect for the communities where tourism occurs, these benefits include:

- Deepening and creating more authentic visitor experiences.
- Bridging business travel with leisure travel.
- Creating additional funding streams for tourism, such as Preserve America grants or Heritage Tourism funds.
- Improving the financial success of small towns and natural resource assets.
- Expanding the overall market for tourism by bringing in new visitors.
- Linking current and new residents to the history and culture of the area.
- Leveraging local residents as tourism ambassadors for visiting friends and relatives.

The list of hidden assets includes: <sup>[6-16]</sup>

- Tribal Assets:
  - Colbert’s Ferry
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - Ghost Towns
  - World’s Largest Peanut



## Overview of Goal & Strategies

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### Goals

- Goal 1: Improvement and generation of family-friendly tourist attractions to increase visitor attendance and enhance visitor experience.
  - Strategy Identify undeveloped to identify possibly locations for tourism attractions and determine method of funding.
- Goal 2: Identify, create and promote tourism opportunities to drive visitation outside of Durant.
  - Strategy: Identify stakeholders and potential tourism assets to promote within surrounding areas

## **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION**

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Goal 1: Improvement and generation of family-friendly tourist attractions to increase visitor attendance and enhance visitor experience.

Strategy: Identify undeveloped to identify possibly locations for tourism attractions and determine method of funding.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important to the county in order to increase attendance and generate additional revenue outside of the gaming industry.
- Approach – Partner with economic development company to provide incentives to stakeholders and potential investors interested in capitalizing on tourism product within Love County.
- Tasks – Identify and coordinate undeveloped land and determine incentives and economic tools available for potential investors.
  - Timeline – Based upon decision of investor.
  - Resources – Project manager, architect and designer, community organization support and city involvement (permits and utilities departments)

Goal 2: Identify, create and promote tourism opportunities to drive visitation outside of Durant.

Strategy: Identify stakeholders and potential tourism assets to promote within surrounding areas.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important to create awareness of smaller communities within Bryan County in order to increase visitation and revenue.
- Approach – Determine key organizations with the ability to identify and create potential tourism assets to drive visitation.
- Tasks – Hold community meetings to identify tourism opportunities based on hidden assets within the county and execute a plan of action created by the tourism organizations.
  - Timeline – Setup initial meeting within six (6) months.
  - Resources – Community stakeholders, organizations, community members and DMO's.



## TARGET MARKET

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### Introduction

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Bryan County's target audience is determined by the following demographics, geographic markets and niche groups based on tourism offerings and resources.

### Demographics

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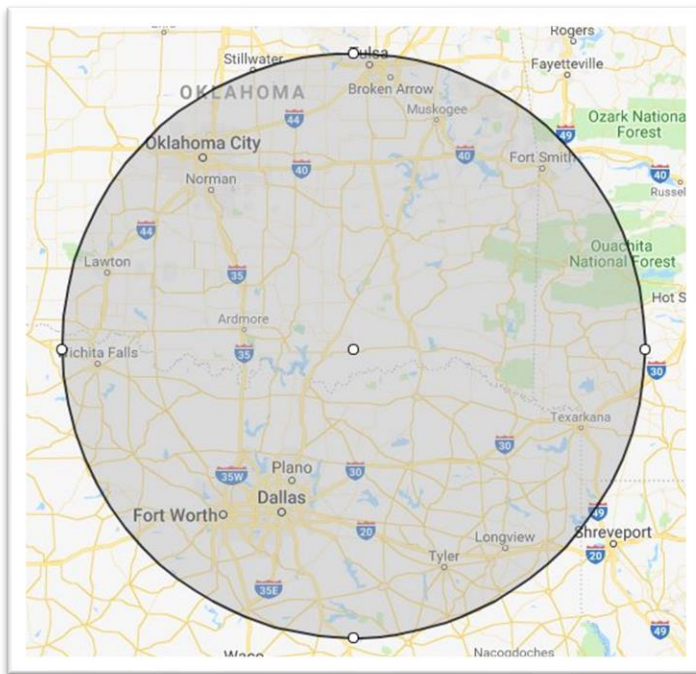
In the travel industry over 70% of all family vacations are planned by the female of the household, according to US Travel Research data. Based on tourism assets available and numerous outdoor recreational activities driving male visitation and conversations with community stakeholders, the following age range was determined as Bryan County's target market: <sup>[3, 6-16]</sup>

- Female: 19 – 65
- Male: 25 – 70

### Geographic Regions

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Research shows that a traveler feels a 350 mile radius is a comfortable distance to travel for a vacation or getaway and we believe that north Texas and Oklahoma City Metro Area are ripe markets for the unique experience Bryan County has to offer. Research shows that the international market is very interested in First American culture, the close proximity Chickasaw Country is to DFW airport and their direct flights; foreign countries are a prime market for Chickasaw Country.



Radius of 350 miles from Bryan County <sup>[2]</sup>

- **Oklahoma**
  - Entire State
- **Texas**
  - North Texas
  - Dallas/Fort Worth
  - Amarillo
  - Abilene
  - Austin
  - Houston
  - Amarillo
  - Lubbock
- **Arkansas**
  - Entire State
- **Kansas**
  - Entire State
- **Nebraska**
  - Lincoln
  - Omaha
- **Missouri**
  - Springfield
  - Branson
  - St. Louis
  - Joplin
- **Louisiana**
  - Shreveport
  - Monroe
  - Alexandria
  - New Orleans
- **International**
  - Canada
  - Mexico
  - Germany
  - Australia

## Other Customer Segments

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### Niche Markets: <sup>[6-16]</sup>

- First American Heritage
- Hunters and Fishermen
- Unique Festival seekers
- Outdoor & Small-town Adventurers
- Local shopping lovers
- Ghost town seekers

## EVENTS

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The Chickasaw Country region covers a small portion of Bryan County; however, no annual events take place within those boundaries. Due to a management contract, the Chickasaw Nation supports Fort Washita and events at this destination have been included in the table below:

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Durant	
Fort Washita World War II Weekend	February
Taste of Durant	February/March
Rendezvous at Fort Washita	April
Magnolia Farmers Market	May-October
Magnolia Festival	May/June (Weekend after Memorial Day)
Draggin Main Car Show & Cruise	June
Magnolia Christmas Fest	November
Christmas Parade	December

By hosting these events with local Chambers, businesses and cities, it gives Bryan County the opportunity to be seen as a destination attraction.

## RESOURCES

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- 2) Radius Tool: <https://www.mapdevelopers.com/draw-circle-tool.php>
- 3) Free Map Tools (2018). [Tool used to find the radius around a point on a map]. Radius from furthest point of the common tourists. Retrieved from <https://www.freemaptools.com/radius-around-point.htm>
- 4) United States Census Bureau (2019). QuickFacts Bryan County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bryancountyoklahoma,US/PST045219>
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- 7) E. McDaniel, Durant, OK; Personal Communication, May 31, 2017
- 8) A. Green, Oklahoma City, OK; Personal Communication, May 10, 2017
- 9) L. Wilkerson, Oklahoma City, OK; Personal Communication, May 10, 2017
- 10) Choctaw Casino Resort; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017
- 11) Choctaw RV Park; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017
- 12) J. McDaniel, Durant, OK; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017
- 13) Durant Chamber of Commerce; Personal Communication, June 9, 2017
- 14) Durant Main Street Organization; Personal Communication, June 9, 2017
- 15) Lake Texoma Association; Personal Communication, June 9, 2017
- 16) J. Callaway, Durant, OK; Personal Communication, June 12, 2017
- 17) Overnight Accommodations: RV Station Resort; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 18) Overnight Accommodations: River View RV & Recreational Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 19) Overnight Accommodations: Lake Texoma Lodge & Resort; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 20) Overnight Accommodations: Lake Texoma RV Resort; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 21) Overnight Accommodations: Wanda's Wish; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 22) Overnight Accommodations: Willow Springs Marina & Resort; Personal Communication, July 2021