

Coal County

Tourism Development Plan



2021 Coal County Tourism Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Coal County Tourism Assessment is a roadmap to help move Coal 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.

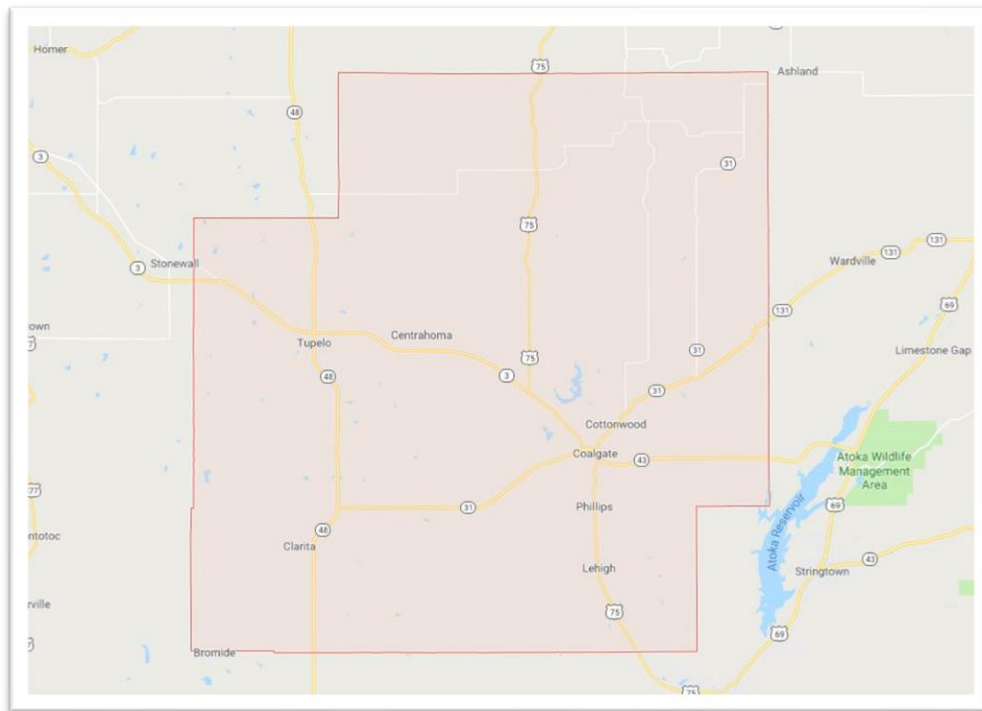
This assessment – and the related goals and strategies – is the result of the Chickasaw Country team's extensive conversation with stakeholders and Coal County leadership. The planning process used to develop this final document was open and transparent, with stakeholders encouraged to provide both positive 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 Coal 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 Coal 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

As part of the Coal County Tourism Assessment, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Coal County. The Dean Runyan Associates data indicates that Coal County employed 40 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$2.1 million in visitor spending^[1]. 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 Coal County ^[4]

Current County Population: 5,495 (2019) ^[3]

- Age 0-5 6.9%
- Age 6-18 23.7%
- Age 19-64 48.4%
- Ages 65+ 21%

- Female 50.1%
- Male 49.9%

Current Economic Resources: ^[1-9]

- Agriculture
- Annual Community Events
- Main Street Shopping

Current Tourism Related Organizations: ^[6-9]

- Choctaw County, Inc.
- Coal County Chamber of Commerce
- Choctaw Country Tourism

Current County Unemployment Rate: ^[5]

- April 2021 5.6%
- April 2020 10.1%
- April 2019 2.5%

Cities with Tourism Product:

- Clarita
- Coalgate

Overnight Spending

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 Coal County is \$27 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$66.

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 Coal 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 Coal County.

Tourism is Economic Development

Tourism is the third economic driver for the state of Oklahoma creating more than 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 Coal County represented approximately 1.5% of the county's total employment in 2018 and paid \$650,000 in total wages in 2018^[1]. 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 Coal 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 are circulated within Coal 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 Coal County residents.

Highly Functioning Tourism System

The assessment builds on the successes of previous tourism efforts put forth by the stakeholders within Coal County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Coal County. As a result of this planned approach, Coal 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 Coal 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

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. Coal 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

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
- Non-commercial
- Slower paced atmosphere
- Approximately 45 miles to Durant
- Amish Community
- Agri-tourism
- Young demographic
- Approximately 16 miles to U.S. Highway 69

Weaknesses:

- Limited community information
- Limited social media representation and marketing efforts
- Limited accommodations
- Limited dining establishments
- Limited infrastructure

Opportunities:

- Opportunity for additional community events and organizations
- Undeveloped Land
- Limited accommodations

Threats:

- Limited job opportunities
- Limited community interest/involvement
- No stakeholders/investors

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 Coal 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:
 - N/A
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Amish community events
 - Mowdy Mustang Ranch

Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	0	0%	0%	\$0.00
Cabins & Lodging	0	0%	0%	\$0.00
RV's & Campgrounds	0	0%	0%	\$0.00

**Data collected as of July 2021*

*** 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 Coal 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:
 - Main Street Shopping
 - Coal County Historical and Mining Museum
 - Choctaw Community Center

Hidden Assets Identified

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 one (1) “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:

- Tribal Assets:
 - N/A
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Choctaw Community Center

Overview of Goal & Strategies

Goal

- Goal 1: Create a county newsletter to generate awareness of events, businesses and organizational endeavors.
 - Strategy: Identify an organization to handle newsletter and gather information to be provided to community members.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 1: Create a county newsletter to generate awareness of events, businesses and organizational endeavors.

Strategy: Identify an organization to handle newsletter and gather information to be provided to community members.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important to the county in order to create awareness throughout the county and generate higher volumes of participation amongst community members.
- Approach – Determine individual or entity responsible for developing newsletter. Determine timeline and preferred content. Identify resources within community with readily available databases. Determine the delivery mechanism and budget.
- Tasks – Develop newsletter format. Create database for newsletter delivery. Communicate process to community individuals and stakeholders. Set deadlines for submissions. Compile received information and distribute in a timely manner.
 - Timeline – This will be a bi-monthly endeavor (*suggested*).
 - Resources – Community point person responsible for newsletter, individuals, businesses and organizations with existing databases to assist with creation of newsletter database.

TARGET MARKET

Introduction

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

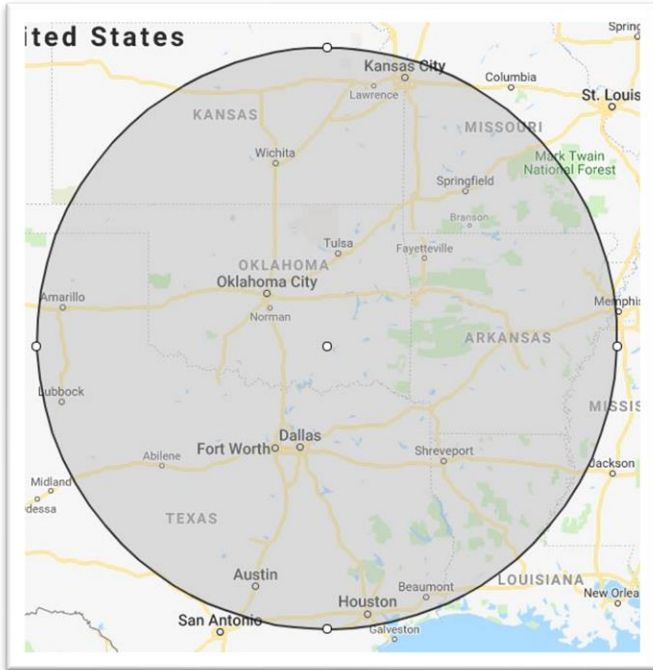
Demographics

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 Coal County's target market. ^[3, 6-9]

- Female: 19 – 65
- Male: 25 – 70

Geographic Regions

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 Coal 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 Coal County ^[2]

- **Oklahoma**
 - Tulsa
 - Oklahoma City
 - Norman
- **Texas**
 - North Texas
 - Dallas/Fort Worth
 - Amarillo
 - Abilene
 - Austin
 - Houston
 - Amarillo
 - Lubbock
- **Arkansas**
 - Texarkana
 - Shreveport
 - Hot Springs
- **Kansas**
 - Wichita
 - Lawrence
- **Missouri**
 - Springfield
 - Branson
- **International**
 - Canada
 - Mexico
 - Germany
 - Australia

Other Customer Segments

Niche Markets: ^[6-9]

- Hunters and Fishermen
- Unique Festival seekers
- Outdoor & Small-town Adventurers

EVENTS

The Chickasaw Country region covers a small portion of Coal County; however, no annual events take place within those boundaries.

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Not Available	Not Available

RESOURCES

- 1) Dean Runyan Associates (December 2019). Oklahoma Travel Impacts. Retrieved from <https://ds8hbldo2z4gr.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/OK-Travel-Impacts-Statewide-and-County-Impacts-2010-20181.pdf>
- 2) Radius Tool: <https://www.mapdevelopers.com/draw-circle-tool.php>
- 3) United States Census Bureau. (2019). QuickFacts Coal County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/coalcountyoklahoma/PST045219>
- 4) Google Maps
- 5) Economic Research (2021). Unemployment Rate in Coal County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/OKCOAL9URN>
- 6) Coal County Chamber of Commerce, Coalgate, OK; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017
- 7) E. McDaniels, Durant, OK; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017
- 8) J. McDaniels, Durant, OK; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017
- 9) J. Callaway, Durant, OK; Personal Communication, June 1, 2017

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