

# Grady County

## Tourism Development Plan



# 2021 Grady County Tourism Assessment

## INTRODUCTION

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

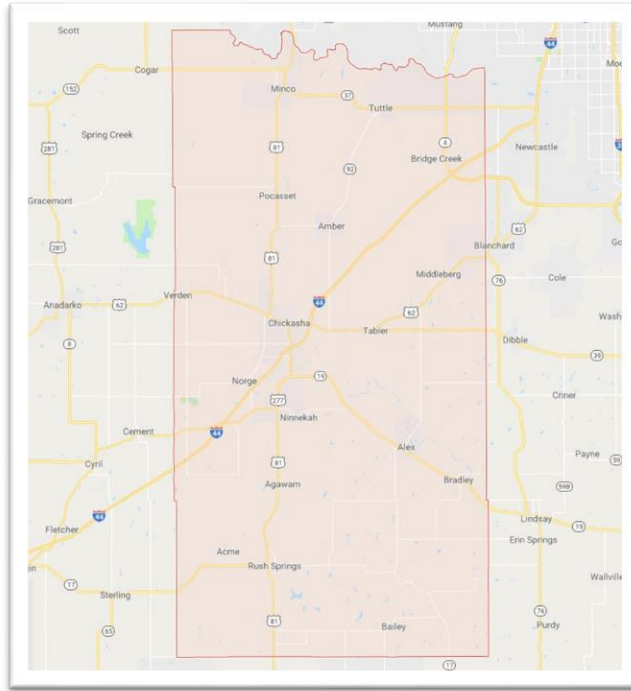
It is important to highlight that the plan was developed during an economically challenging time, for Grady County and stakeholders within both the public and private sectors. To help anticipate financial and time commitments required in implementation, the plan includes recommended phasing. Strategies 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 Grady 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 Grady County Tourism Assessment, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Grady County. The Dean Runyan Associates data indicates that Grady County employed 1,390 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$76.4 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 Grady County<sup>[4]</sup>*

**Current County Population: 55,834 (2019)<sup>[3]</sup>**

- Age 0-5            5.6%
- Age 6-18        23.7%
- Age 19-64      54%
- Ages 65+        16.7%
  
- Female            50.0%
- Male              50.0%

**Current Economic Resources:<sup>[1-7]</sup>**

- Agriculture
- Manufacturing plants
- University/college
- Medical centers
- Annual community events

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

- April 2021      3.8%
- April 2020      12.3%
- April 2019      2.3%

**Current Tourism Related Organizations:<sup>[6-7]</sup>**

- Chickasha County Chamber of Commerce
- Tuttle Chamber of Commerce
- Frontier Country

**Cities with Tourism Product:**

- Chickasha
- Tuttle
- Amber-Pocasset
- Minco
- Rush Springs
- Alex

## 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 Grady County is \$80 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$207.

The ultimate focus of this plan is to generate additional overnight stays, and encourage travelers to stay longer, experience more and return to Grady 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 Grady 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 Grady County represented approximately 6.1% of the county's total employment in 2018 and paid more than \$24.94 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 Grady 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 Grady 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 Grady 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 Grady County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Grady County. As a result of this planned approach, Grady 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 Grady 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. Grady 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
- Canadian Valley Technology Center
- University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma (USAO)
- Authentic atmosphere
- Salt Creek Casino
- Braum's Family Farm
- Proximity to major highways
- Regional medical hub
- County Government Seat

### **Weaknesses:**

- Surrounding towns of Chickasha have limited attractions
- Limited community information
- Limited digital representation and marketing efforts
- Limited dining establishments
- Economy is dependent upon Oil & Gas Industry
- Limited accommodations

### **Opportunities:**

- Improve lines of communication between communities and stakeholders
- Education

- Undeveloped land
- County history
- Fine arts
- Energy employment opportunities
- Chisholm Trail
- Main Street Development

Threats:

- Limited job opportunities
- Limited tourism attractions
- Economy is dependent upon Oil & Gas Industry
- Limited business/individual marketing campaigns

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 Grady 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:
  - Salt Creek Casino
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - Baum’s Family Farms
  - University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO)
  - Canadian Valley Technology Center
  - Grady County Historical Society
  - Shannon Springs Park – Chickasha Festival of Light
  - Plantation at Coal Creek
  - Annual events
  - Grady County Fairgrounds

Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	667	68%	60%	\$87.72
Cabins & Lodging	0	0%	0%	\$0.00
RV’s & Campgrounds	85	57%	53%	\$41.67

*\*Data collected as of July 2021 [8-19]*

**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 Grady 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
  - Zippety's Lazer World
  - Chickasha Sports Complex
  - Land, Washita River and Lakes nearby
  - Atmosphere

### 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 one (1) "new" asset. 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>[6-17]</sup>

- Tribal Assets:
  - N/A
  
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - **Ken's Steak & Ribs**



## Overview of Goal & Strategies

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### Goals

- Goal 1: Create dashboard used to report tourism-related data from local businesses, community destinations and attractions.
  - Strategy: Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Organizations to create monthly reporting documents to track revenue, city sales tax, visitation to determine a specific trend within the community.
- Goal 2: 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.
- Goal 3: Create a county-wide marketing plan.
  - Strategy: Identify stakeholders who will assist in designing the plan and determine budgeting aspects.

## TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION

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Goal 1: Create dashboard used to report tourism-related data from local businesses, community destinations and attractions.

Strategy: Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Organizations to create monthly reporting documents to track revenue, city sales tax, visitation to determine a specific trend within the community.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important to the county in order to assist with future business decisions based off visitation and spending trends.
- Approach – Determine individual or entity responsible for developing report. Determine necessary data based off feedback from stakeholders and determine distribution process.
- Tasks – Develop report formatting and communication efforts in order to educate businesses on the benefits of reporting information. Set deadlines for reporting to ensure data is secured in a timely manner, then compile received data and distribute results.
  - Timeline – This will be updated monthly.
  - Resources – Community point person, business participation and data.

Goal 2: 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 and determine the delivery mechanism and budget.
- Tasks – Develop newsletter format and create a database for newsletter delivery. Communicate the process to community individuals and stakeholders. Set deadlines for submissions and 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.

Goal 3: Create a county-wide marketing plan.

Strategy: Identify stakeholders who will assist in designing the plan and determine budgeting aspects.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important in order to generate awareness and increase visitation and revenue within the county.
- Approach – Determine individual or entity responsible for developing the marketing plan. Identify tourism pillars to be marketed and determine budget.
- Tasks – Develop plan format and utilize County Tourism S.W.O.T. Analysis as a guideline to be adjusted as needed. Coordinate meetings to receive feedback from community stakeholders and businesses. Compile information received and determine measurements, advertising mediums and budget.
  - Timeline – This will be created each at the beginning of each fiscal year (*suggested*).
  - Resources – Community stakeholders, individuals, businesses, organizations and DMO's.

## TARGET MARKET

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### Introduction

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Grady 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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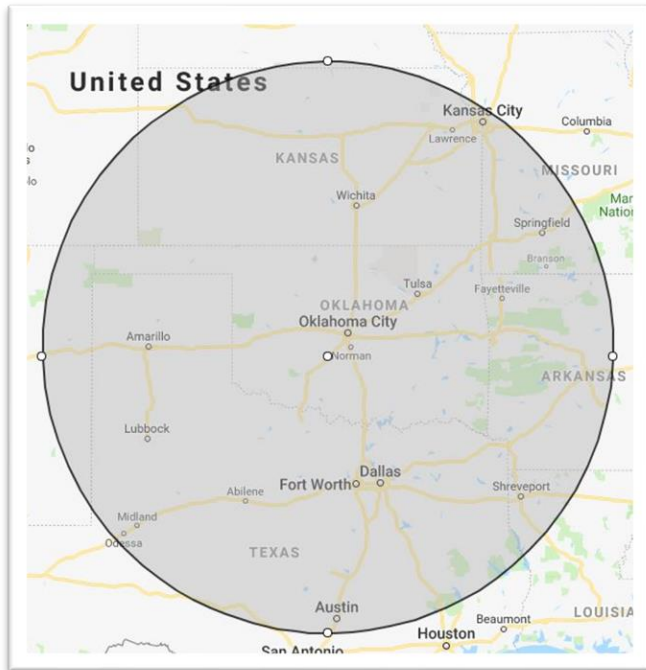
In the travel industry over 70% of all family vacations are planned by the female of the household, according to US Travel Research data. Based on tourism assets available and numerous outdoor recreational activities driving male visitation and conversations with community stakeholders, the following age range was determined as Grady County's target market: <sup>[3, 6-17]</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 Grady County has to offer. Research shows that the international market is very interested in the Native American culture the close proximity Chickasaw Country has to DFW airport and their direct flights, International is a prime market:



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

- **Oklahoma**
  - Entire State
- **Texas**
  - Dallas/Ft. Worth
  - Abilene
  - North Texas
  - Austin
  - Amarillo
  - Lubbock
- **Arkansas**
  - Texarkana
  - Shreveport
  - Hot Springs
- **Kansas**
  - Wichita
  - Lawrence
- **Louisiana**
  - Shreveport
- **Missouri**
  - Springfield
  - Branson
- **International**
  - Canada
  - Mexico
  - Germany
  - Australia

## Other Customer Segments

### Niche Markets: <sup>[6-7]</sup>

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

## EVENTS

Grady County plans to continue supporting events in select communities. Events are planned to help drive tourist to the community and help local businesses generate revenue. Grady County hosted the following annual events:

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Chickasha	
Chocolate Celebration	February
Pre-War Swap Meet	March
USAO Droverstock	April
USAO Montmartre Chalk Art Festival	April
Antique Auto Club Swap Meet	May & October
Wings & Wheels Fly In	June
Chickasha Rodeo	June
Christmas in July	July
Grady County Free Fair	August
JSW Spaghetti Day	September
Oklahoma Food Truck Championship	October
Rock Island Arts Festival	October

Rock Island Ride	October
Christmas Expressions Craft Show	November
Christmas Parade	December
Buy Chickasha	December
Altrusa Hall of Trees	December
Festival of Light	December
Rush Springs	
Rush Springs Watermelon Festival	August
Minco	
Minco Honey Festival	December

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



## RESOURCES

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- 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 Grady County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/gradycountyoklahoma,US/PST045219>
- 4) Google Maps
- 5) Economic Research (2021). Unemployment Rate in Grady County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/OKGRAD1URN>
- 6) A. Green; Personal Communication, March 2017
- 7) L. Wilkerson; Personal Communication, March 2017
- 8) Overnight Accommodations: Windy Bill's and Ol' Mills Place RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 9) Overnight Accommodations: America's Best Value Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 10) Overnight Accommodations: Hampton Inn Chickasha; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 11) Overnight Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 12) Overnight Accommodations: Maverick Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 13) Overnight Accommodations: Quality Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 14) Overnight Accommodations: Ranch House Motel; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 15) Overnight Accommodations: Regency Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 16) Overnight Accommodations: Super 8 Motel; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 17) Overnight Accommodations: Best Western Lindsay Inn & Suites; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 18) Overnight Accommodations: Trend Travel Stop Motel & RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 19) Overnight Accommodations: Rosewood Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021