

Johnston County

Tourism Development Plan



2021 Johnston County Tourism Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Johnston County Tourism Assessment is a roadmap to help move Johnston 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 Johnston 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 Johnston 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 Johnston 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 Johnston County Tourism Assessment, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Johnston County. The Dean Runyan Associates data indicates that Johnston County employed 100 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$5.8 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 Johnston County^[4]

Current County Population: 11,085 (2019)^[3]

- Age 0-5 6%
- Age 6-18 24%
- Age 19-64 50.2%
- Ages 65+ 19.8%

- Female 50.5%
- Male 49.5%

Current County Unemployment Rate:^[5]

- April 2021 4.7%
- April 2020 16.2%
- April 2019 2.8%

Cities with Tourism Product:

- Tishomingo
- Milburn
- Rava
- Mannsville

Current Economic Resources:^[1-17]

- Agriculture
- Oil & Gas
- Mineral works
- University/college
- Medical centers
- Schools/education
- Annual community events
- Main Street shopping
- Tishomingo Wildlife Refuge
- Blue River
- Lake Texoma

Current Tourism Related Organizations:^[6-14]

- Johnston County Chamber of Commerce
- Main Street Organizations
- Chickasaw Nation Information Center
- Chickasaw Country Marketing Association

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. There is a notable difference between overnight visitors and “day trippers.” According to 2018 Dean Runyan Associates data, the average overnight spend per person in Johnston County is \$33 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$78.

Because of this significant difference in the economic value of overnight and day visitors, the ultimate focus of this plan is to generate additional overnight stays, and encourage travelers to stay longer, experience more and return to Johnston 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 Johnston County.

Tourism is Economic Development

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 Johnston County represented approximately 1.5% of the county’s total employment in 2018 and paid more than \$1.98 million in total wages in 2018¹¹. 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 Johnston 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 Johnston 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 Johnston County residents.

Highly Functioning Tourism System

The assessment builds on the successes of previous tourism efforts put forth by the stakeholders within Johnston County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Johnston County. As a result of this planned approach, Johnston 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 Johnston 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. Johnston 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
- Murray State College
- Oil and gas industry
- Mineral works
- Chickasaw Nation Information Center
- Youth and young adult education available
- Johnston County OSU Extension
- Authentic atmosphere
- Well-developed Main Street
- Chickasaw Nation culture and attractions

Weaknesses:

- Surrounding towns of Tishomingo have limited attractions
- Limited community information
- Community and county websites do not provide current information
- Limited social media representation and marketing efforts
- Murray State College offers 36 Associate Degree programs, 12 Associate of Applied Science Degree programs, and limited job placement within the county
- Limited accommodations
- Limited dining establishments
- State restrictions at Blue River

Opportunities:

- Opportunity for additional community events and organizations
- Johnston County partnership with Murray State College
- Murray State College (Fine Arts Department, Gunsmithing Program, Rodeo Arena)
- Education
- Undeveloped land
- Lake Texoma, Lake Murray and Arbuckle Mountains are within an hour away
- History of Chickasaw Nation and Indian Territory available in this area
- Chickasaw Nation Information Center
- History throughout towns of Johnston County
- Attendance and awareness of high school and Murray State College athletics
- Johnston County OSU Extension
- Marketing efforts for anchor and sustaining clusters in Johnston County
- Fine arts
- Sipokni West
- Awareness of literacy works
- Growth awareness at Pennington Creek
- Limited accommodations
- Town murals/artwork

Threats:

- Main street dependency on celebrity business endeavors
- Limited job opportunities
- Of the 6 cities within Johnston County, Tishomingo attracts roughly 95% of tourists
- Limited accommodations
- 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 Johnston 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:
 - Chickasaw Nation Information Center
 - Chickasaw National Capitol
 - Chickasaw Council House Museum
 - Chickasaw White House
 - Gaming and Tobacco Center
 - Chickasaw Annual Meeting and Festival (October)
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Main Street Shopping & Boutiques
 - Murray State College
 - Pennington Park
 - Pennington Creek Hunting Club

- Blue River
- Ole Red & The Doghouse
- Lake Texoma
- Wildlife Refuge

Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	29	68%	43%	\$124.75
Cabins & Lodging	14	51%	35%	\$218.00
RV's & Campgrounds	157	59%	40%	\$30.00

**Data collected as of July 2021 [15-28]*

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 Johnston 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:
 - Annual events through Chickasaw Nation facilities
 - Native American Culture
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Agri-tourism related destinations (seasonal)
 - Hunting, fishing, and camping
 - Land, Rivers, and Lakes nearby
 - Atmosphere
 - Main street shopping
 - Murray State College and athletic events
 - Johnston County Events

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 11 “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: ^[4,16,17]

- Tribal Assets:
 - Chickasaw History
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Ten Acre Rock
 - Natural Spring in Bromide and history of visitor's attraction to the Bromide area
 - Railway History
 - Old Settler Days – Milburn
 - Johnston County Veterans Building
 - Murray State College (Fine Arts Department, Gunsmithing Program, Rodeo Arena)
 - Pontotoc Ridge Preserve
 - Oka Yanali Preserve
 - Farm to table bed and breakfast
 - Ghost Towns

Overview of Goal & Strategies

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

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. Develop communication efforts in order to educate businesses on benefits of reporting information. Set deadlines for reporting to ensure data is secured in a timely manner. 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. 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.

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 received information 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

Introduction

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

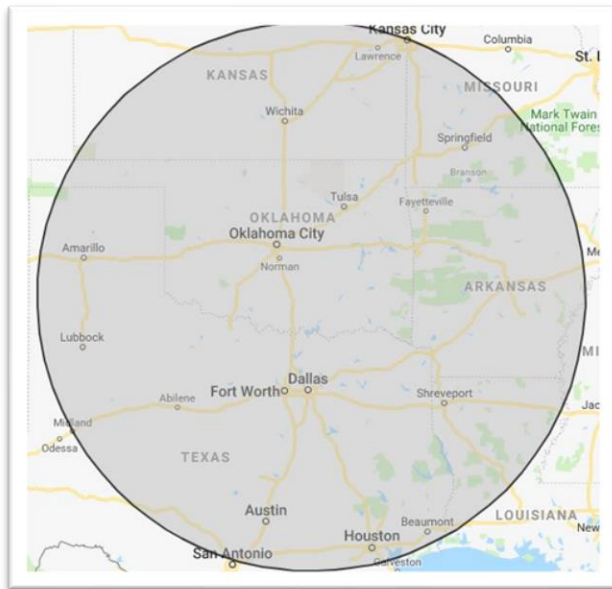
Demographics

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 Johnston County's target market: ^[8-17]

- 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 Johnston 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 Johnston County ^[2]

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

Other Customer Segments

Niche Markets: ^[6-19]

- Native American Heritage
- Hunters and Fishermen
- Unique Festival seekers
- Outdoor & Small-town Adventurers
- Local shopping lovers
- Ghost town seekers
- Bed & Breakfast stayers
- Country Music/Western fans

EVENTS

Johnston 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. Johnston County hosted the following annual events:

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Tishomingo	
President's Day Blue River Trout Derby	February
CN Capitol & Council House Events	April – September
Tishomingo Fire Dept Annual Fish Fry	April
Gospel Singing at the White House	May
Ravia Fire Dept Annual BBQ	May
Milburn Fire Dept Annual BBQ	May
Fit & Fun Camp	June
Johnston County Farmer's Market	June – October
Johnston County Red, White & BOOM Celebration	July
Johnston County Free Fair	August
Reaching Out Fish Fry	September
Victory Angel Run	October
Chickasaw Nation Annual Meeting & Festival	October
Trunk or Treat (Pennington Creek Park)	October
Run, Ride, Row Johnston County	October
Veterans Day Blue River Trout Derby	November
Small Business Saturday Giveaways	November
Let It Glow: A Holiday Light Competition	December
Breakfast with Santa	December
Johnston County Christmas Parade	December
Christmas Tree Lighting	December
Living Windows on Main Street	December
County-Wide Christmas Dinner	December
Chickasaw Spirit Holiday Tour	December
Milburn	
Old Settler's Day	May

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

RESOURCES

- 1) Dean Runyan Associates (December 2019). Oklahoma Travel Impacts. Retrieved from <https://ds8hblido2z4gr.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 Johnston County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/johnstoncountyoklahoma,US/PST045219>
- 4) Google Maps
- 5) Economic Research (2021). Unemployment Rate in Johnston County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/OKJOHN9URN>
- 6) Genealogy Trails History Group. (2016). Cities and Towns of Johnston county, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <http://genealogytrails.com/oka/johnston/citiesandtowns.html>
- 7) Murray State College. (January 2012). Strategic Plan 2010-2016. Retrieved from <http://www.msoc.edu/sites/www/Uploads/files/About%20MSC/strategicplan.pdf>
- 8) Branstins, Tishomingo, OK; Personal Communication, May 5, 2016
- 9) Vagabond Junktiques, Tishomingo, OK; Personal Communication, May 5, 2016
- 10) Murray on Main, Tishomingo, OK; Personal Communication, May 5, 2016
- 11) S. Addison; Personal Communication, May 5, 2016, May 10, 2016 and May 13, 2016
- 12) J. Lokey; Personal Communication, May 5, 2016
- 13) T. Postoak; Personal Communication, May 10, 2016
- 14) A. Jacobson; Personal Communication, May 5, 2016 and May 10, 2016
- 15) Overnight Accommodations: Blue River Retreat; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 16) Overnight Accommodations: Buffalo Land Blue River RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 17) Overnight Accommodations: Camp Bond; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 18) Overnight Accommodations: Cedar & Stone Bed & Breakfast; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 19) Overnight Accommodations: Family Farm House; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 20) Overnight Accommodations: Highway 22 RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 21) Overnight Accommodations: Pennington Creek Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 22) Overnight Accommodations: Rock Creek Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 23) Overnight Accommodations: Scotty's Blue River One Stop & RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 24) Overnight Accommodations: The Pennington Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 25) Overnight Accommodations: Tishomingo Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 26) Overnight Accommodations: Wildhorse Cabin; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 27) Overnight Accommodations: Blue Acres Ranch; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 28) Overnight Accommodations: The Wildflower Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021