

Love County

Tourism Development Plan



2021 Love County Tourism Assessment

INTRODUCTION

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

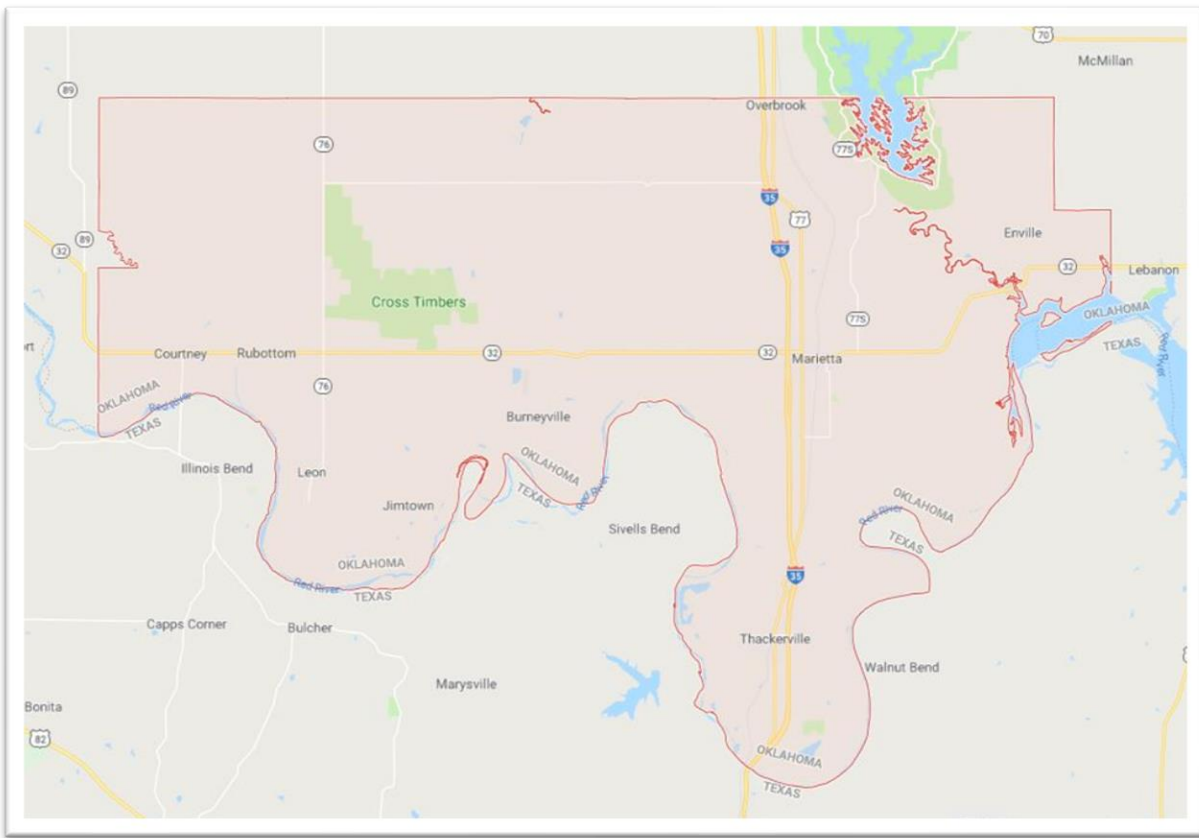
This assessment – and the related goals and strategies – is the result of the Chickasaw Country team's extensive conversation with stakeholders and Love County leadership. The planning process used to develop this final document was open and transparent, with stakeholders encouraged to provide both positive 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 Love 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 Love 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 Love County Tourism Assessment, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Love County. The Dean Runyan Associates data indicates that Love County employed 3,340 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$572.5 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 Love County ^[4]

Current County Population: 10,253 (2019) ^[3]

- Age 0-5 6.3%
- Age 6-18 24%
- Age 19-64 50.1%
- Ages 65+ 19.6%

- Female 49.9%
- Male 50.1%

Current Economic Resources: ^[1-11]

- Falcon Head Resort
- Lake Murray
- Lake Texoma
- Marietta Industrial Park
- Agriculture
- WinStar World Casino & Resort

Current County Unemployment Rate: ^[5]

- April 2021 2.3%
- April 2020 10%
- April 2019 1.8%

Current Tourism Related Organizations: ^[6-11]

- City of Marietta
- Thackerville Tourism Information Center
- Love County Chamber of Commerce
- Chickasaw Country Marketing Association
- City of Thackerville

Cities with Tourism Product:

- Marietta
- Thackerville
- Burneyville

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 Love County is \$204 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$401.

The ultimate focus of this plan is to generate additional overnight stays, and encourage travelers to stay longer, experience more and return to Love 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 Love 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 Love County represented approximately 41.8% of the county's total employment in 2018 and paid more than \$135.03 million 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 Love 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 Love 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 Love County residents.

Highly Functioning Tourism System

The assessment builds on the successes of previous tourism efforts put forth by the stakeholders within Love County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Love County. As a result of this planned approach, Love 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 Love 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. Love 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
- Proximity to Ardmore
- Proximity to I-35
- Proximity to Dallas

Weaknesses:

- Limited digital representation
- Undeveloped land
- Limited job opportunities outside of the gaming industry
- Limited tourism attractions
- Limited night life opportunities
- Limited dining establishments outside of WinStar World Casino & Resort
- Limited family-friendly attractions

Opportunities:

- Opportunity for additional community events and organization
- Agriculture Tourism
- Undeveloped land
- Lake Texoma, Lake Murray and Arbuckle Mountains are within 58 miles
- Increase and improve community and communication

Threats:

- Area shops depend on visitation to WinStar World Casino & Resort
- Limited business/individual marketing campaigns.
- Competing marketing campaigns between Oklahoma and Texas
- Texas allowing gaming

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 Love 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:
 - WinStar World Casino & Resort
 - Chickasaw Travel Stop-Thackerville
 - Border Casino
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Boutiques
 - Lake Murray
 - Lake Texoma
 - Thackerville Tourism Information Center
 - Falcon Head Resort
 - McGehee’s Catfish Restaurant

Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	1,609	79%	56%	\$110.85
Cabins & Lodging	7	90%	50%	\$125.00
RV’s & Campgrounds	227	85%	70%	\$32.00

**Data collected as of July 2021 [12-21]*

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 Love 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:
 - Hunting, fishing, and camping
 - Land and Lakes nearby
 - Atmosphere
 - Love County Events
 - Red River

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 five (5) “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:
 - **Love County Pioneer Museum**
 - **Love County Military Museum**
 - **Norton’s Jewelry and Territorial Museum**
 - **Ghost Towns**
 - **Sam’s Duck Club**

Overview of Goal & Strategies

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.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION

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)

TARGET MARKET

Introduction

Love 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 Love County's target market. ^[6-11]

- 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 Love 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 Love County [2]

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

Other Customer Segments

Niche Markets: [6-11]

- Native American Heritage
- Hunters and Fishermen
- Gamers
- Outdoor & Small-town Adventurers
- Local shopping lovers
- Ghost town seekers
- Concert goers

EVENTS

Love 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. Love County hosted the following annual events:

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Marietta	
Annual Easter Egg Hunt	March
Golf Scramble	June
Love County Frontier Days	June
Christmas Tree Lighting	December
Thackerville	
Annual Rattlesnake Roundup	April
4 th of July Celebration	July
Christmas Celebration	December

By hosting these events with local Chambers, businesses and cities, it gives Love 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>
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- 7) Thackerville City Hall, Thackerville, OK; Personal Communication, April 4, 2017
- 8) Love County Chamber of Commerce, Marietta, OK; Personal Communication, April 4, 2017
- 9) L. Wilkerson; Personal Communication, April 5, 2017
- 10) A. Green; Personal Communication, April 5, 2017
- 11) N. McMillin, Marietta, OK; Personal Communication, April 21, 2017
- 12) Overnight Accommodations: Falconhead Resort and Country Club; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 13) Overnight Accommodations: Lake Country Motel; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 14) Overnight Accommodations: The Grove RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 15) Overnight Accommodations: Best Western Red River Inn & Suites; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 16) Overnight Accommodations: Red River Inn & Suites; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 17) Overnight Accommodations: Red River Ranch RV Resort; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 18) Overnight Accommodations: River of Love Cabins, LLC; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 19) Overnight Accommodations: The Inn at WinStar; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 20) Overnight Accommodations: WinStar RV Park; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 21) Overnight Accommodations: WinStar World Casino Hotel; Personal Communication, July 2021