

Pontotoc County

Tourism Development Plan



2021 Pontotoc County Tourism Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Pontotoc County Tourism Assessment is a roadmap to help move Pontotoc 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, CVB's, DMO's 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.

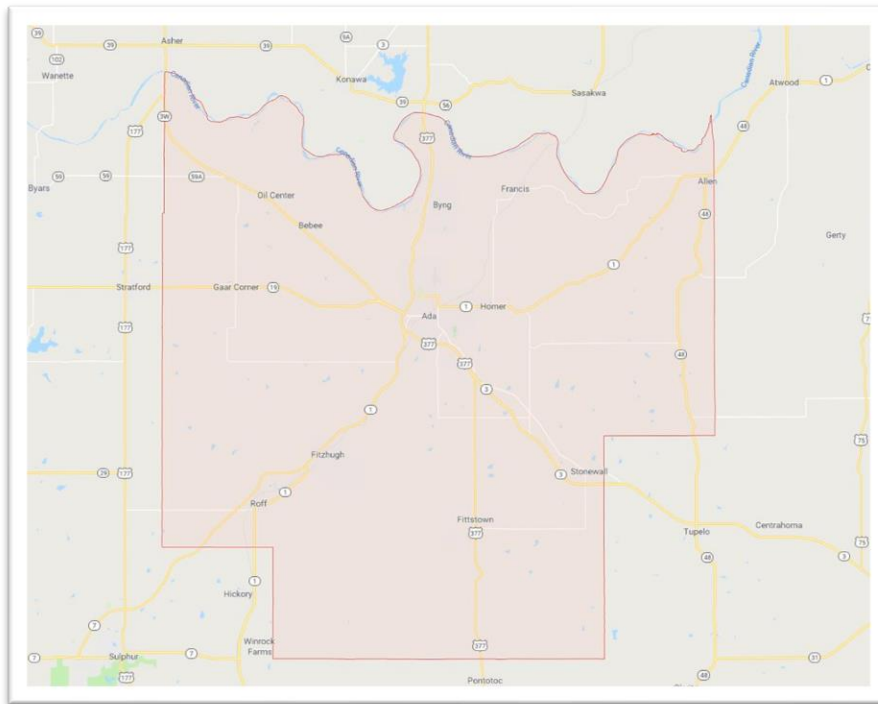
This assessment – and the related goals and strategies – is the result of the Chickasaw Country team's extensive conversation with stakeholders and Pontotoc County leadership. The planning process used to develop this final document was open and transparent, with stakeholders encouraged to provide both 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 Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc County Tourism Plan, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Pontotoc County. Pontotoc County employed 900 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$62.3 million in visitor spending. 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 Pontotoc County ^[4]

Current County Population: 38,284 (2019) ^[3]

- Age 0-5 6.6%
- Age 6-18 24.1%
- Age 19-64 52.7%
- Ages 65+ 16.6%

- Female 51.3%
- Male 48.7%

Current County Unemployment Rate: ^[5]

- April 2021 3.9%
- April 2020 11%
- April 2019 2.2%

Cities with Tourism Product:

- Ada
- Fitzhugh
- Stonewall

Current Economic Resources: ^[1-12]

- Agribusiness
- Equine industry/rodeo
- Driving race track
- Manufacturing, distribution and retail trade/tourism
- East Central University
- Pontotoc Technology Center
- Chickasaw Nation Headquarters
- Native American culture
- Walmart
- Legal Shield
- Gaming

Current Tourism Related Organizations: ^[6-12]

- Ada Area Chamber of Commerce
- Visit Pontotoc
- Ada Main Street Association
- Chickasaw Country Marketing Association

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 Pontotoc County is \$69 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$162.

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 Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc County represented approximately 3.4% of the county's total employment in 2018 and paid more than \$15.89 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 Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc County residents.

Highly Functioning Tourism System

The assessment builds on the successes of previous tourism efforts put forth by the stakeholders within Pontotoc County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Pontotoc County. As a result of this planned approach, Pontotoc 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 Pontotoc County and encourage them to stay longer, explore more and return often.
- Create/Update/Maintain 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. Pontotoc 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. ^[6-12]

Strengths:

- Chickasaw Nation Headquarters
- Annual community events
- Community leadership and infrastructure
- Developing main streets and shopping centers
- Community Center
- Educational opportunities residing within county
- Growing housing market
- Boutique and antique shops
- Growing number of overnight accommodations
- Medical facilities
- Children's entertainment
- Travel Stops
- Gaming and entertainment
- Agriplex

Weaknesses:

- Distance to major metropolitan areas are over half an hour
- Limited night life
- High crime rate
- Limited population diversity with 70.8% ^[3] Caucasian
- Limited communication and leadership within smaller communities
- Limited dining establishments
- Limited tourism assets
- Limited availability for large convention spaces

- Distance of travel without tourism attractions along the route
- Distance to major highways

Opportunities:

- Undeveloped locations for night life
- Increase community activities at Agriplex
- Main streets for hosting events
- Growth potential for Wintersmith Park
- Retail growth
- Growth potential for Ada Municipal Airport
- Waddell Vineyard for hosting events
- Medical tourism opportunities

Threats:

- Travel danger due to two lane highways
- Weather becomes severe throughout year
- Limited revenue from tourists
- Limited revenue due to strained community collaborations

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 Pontotoc 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:
 - Ada Gaming Centers
 - Ada Travel Stops
 - Chickasaw Nation Medical Center
 - Chickasaw Nation Headquarters
 - Lazer Zone Family Fun Center
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Wintersmith Park
 - Agriplex
 - East Central University
 - Main Street shopping

Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	503	52%	56%	\$84.00
Cabins & Lodging	4	65%	50	\$317.00
RV's & Campgrounds	54	50%	50%	\$35.00

**Data collected as of July 2021 [13-23]*

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 Pontotoc 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. [1-12]

The list of sustaining clusters includes:

- Tribal Assets:
 - Native American culture
 - Chickasaw Nation Arts & Humanities Gallery
 - Health facilities
 - McSwain Theatre
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - Community events
 - Recreational activities
 - Collegiate visitation tourism
 - Wintersmith Park
 - Ken Lance 3 Crosses Arena

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 eight (8) “new” assets. The analysis revealed a number of cultural, natural resources 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:
 - Chickasaw Nation Community Gardens
- Non-Tribal Assets:
 - History of Pontotoc County Courthouse
 - [Shiloh Ranch Hunting Camp](#)
 - [Wildcat Springs Ranch](#)
 - [Rodeo events](#)
 - [Celebrity hometown](#)
 - [Main Street community events](#)
 - [Golf Course](#)

Overview of Goals & Strategies

Goals

- Goal 1: Improve quality of community night-life activities.
 - Strategy: Identify stakeholders willing to invest in and integrate night life opportunities within community.
- Goal 2: Restore communication efforts and resolve conflict between community organizations.
 - Strategy: Identify stakeholders to determine a common purpose or goal to unify the organizations and streamline communication.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION

Goals, Strategies & Tasks

Goal 1: Improve quality of community night-life activities.

Strategy: Identify stakeholders willing to invest in and integrate night life opportunities within community.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important to provide community members a sense of local-living while simultaneously boosting economic revenue.
- Approach – Determine current business owners or potential investors.
- Tasks – Identify business/event opportunity, determine a plan of action or business model and execute strategy.
 - Timeline – Based on funding/earnings and willing stakeholders.
 - Resources – Community stakeholders, individuals, businesses, organizations and DMO's.

Goal 2: Restore communication efforts and resolve conflict between community organizations.

Strategy: Identify stakeholders to determine a common purpose or goal to unify the organizations and streamline communication.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important in order to mend the division between organizations and display a united front to community members.
- Approach – Determine key members and leaders with the ability to identify and resolve issues and conflict.
- Tasks – Hold community meetings to identify concerns felt by residents and business owners and pinpoint valid issues to address. Create a communication strategy to implement joint collaboration based off feedback received from community meetings.
 - Timeline – Setup initial meeting within six (6) months.
 - Resources – Community stakeholders, organizations, community members and DMO's.

TARGET MARKET

Introduction

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

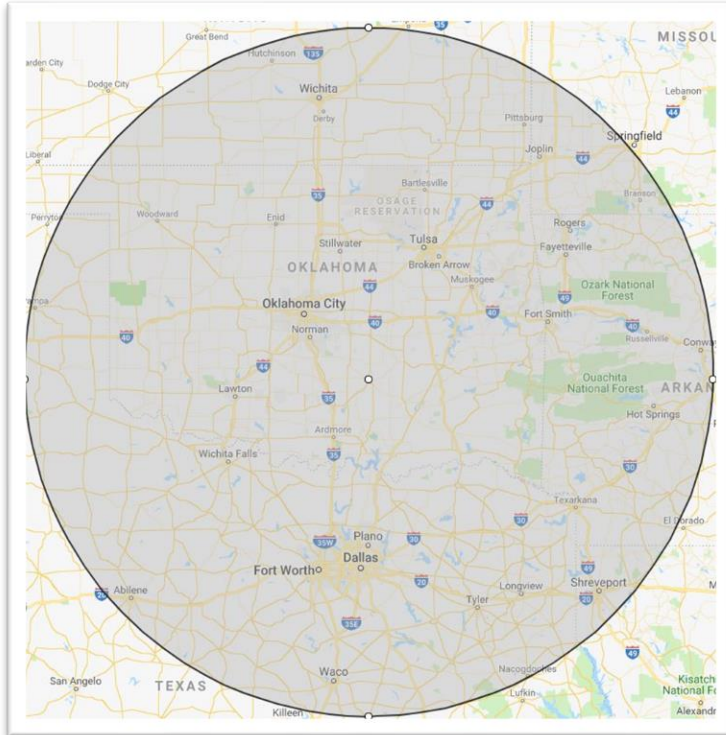
Demographics

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 and gaming product available as well as conversations with community stakeholders, the following age range was determined as Pontotoc County's target market.

- Female: 19 – 65
- Male: 22 – 65

Geographic Regions

Research shows that a traveler feels a 250 mile radius is a comfortable distance to travel for a vacation or getaway and we believe that North Texas and Oklahoma City metro areas are ripe markets for the unique experience Pontotoc County has to offer.



Radius of 250 miles from Pontotoc County ^[2]

- **Oklahoma**
 - Tulsa
 - Oklahoma City
 - Broken Arrow
 - Muskogee
 - Ponca City
 - Stillwater
 - Lawton
 - Norman
 - Enid
 - Bartlesville
 - Ardmore
- **Arkansas**
 - Fort Smith
- **Texas**
 - Dallas/Ft. Worth
 - North Texas
 - Wichita Falls

Other Customer Segments

Niche Markets:

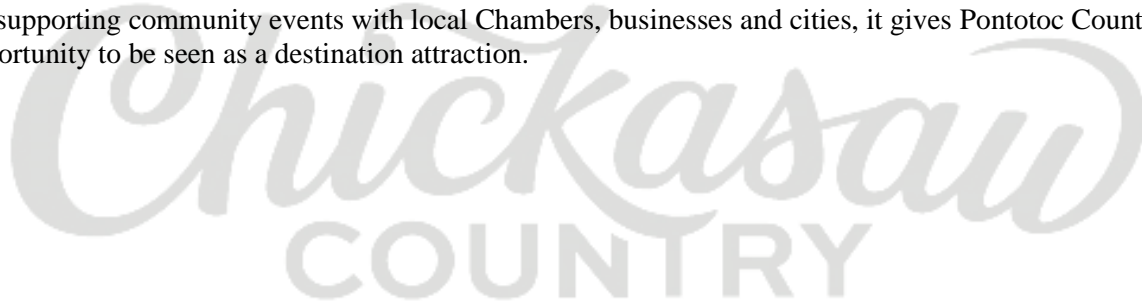
- Art culture & Native American heritage enthusiasts
- Unique event seekers
- Gaming entertainment seekers
- Antique and boutique shoppers
- Business travel
- Family travel
- Medical

EVENTS

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

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Ada	
McSwain Movies and Events	Year Round
Sip-N-Swirl Events at Waddell Vineyards	Year Round
Ada Medieval Fair	April
Pontotoc County Quilt Show	April
Fireworks at Wintersmith Park	July
Music in the Park	August
Ada Fest	August
Marketplace Craft Show	September
Pontotoc County Free Fair	September
Veterans Day Parade	November
Stonewall	
Ken Lance Memorial Rodeo	July

By supporting community events with local Chambers, businesses and cities, it gives Pontotoc County the opportunity to be seen as a destination attraction.



RESOURCES

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- 11) Oklahoma Tourism & Recreation Department website. Events gathered from this resource. (www.travelok.com)
- 12) Ada Area Chamber of Commerce; Personal Communication, 2017
- 13) Overnight Accommodations: Budget Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 14) Overnight Accommodations: Economy Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 15) Overnight Accommodations: Hampton Inn & Suites; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 16) Overnight Accommodations: Hidden Valley RV & Mini Storage; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 17) Overnight Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 18) Overnight Accommodations: La Quinta Inn & Suites; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 19) Overnight Accommodations: Quality Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 20) Overnight Accommodations: Raintree Inn; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 21) Overnight Accommodations: Silver Spur Motel; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 22) Overnight Accommodations: SureStay Ada; Personal Communication, July 2021
- 23) Overnight Accommodations: Dos Equis Ranch; Personal Communication, July 2021