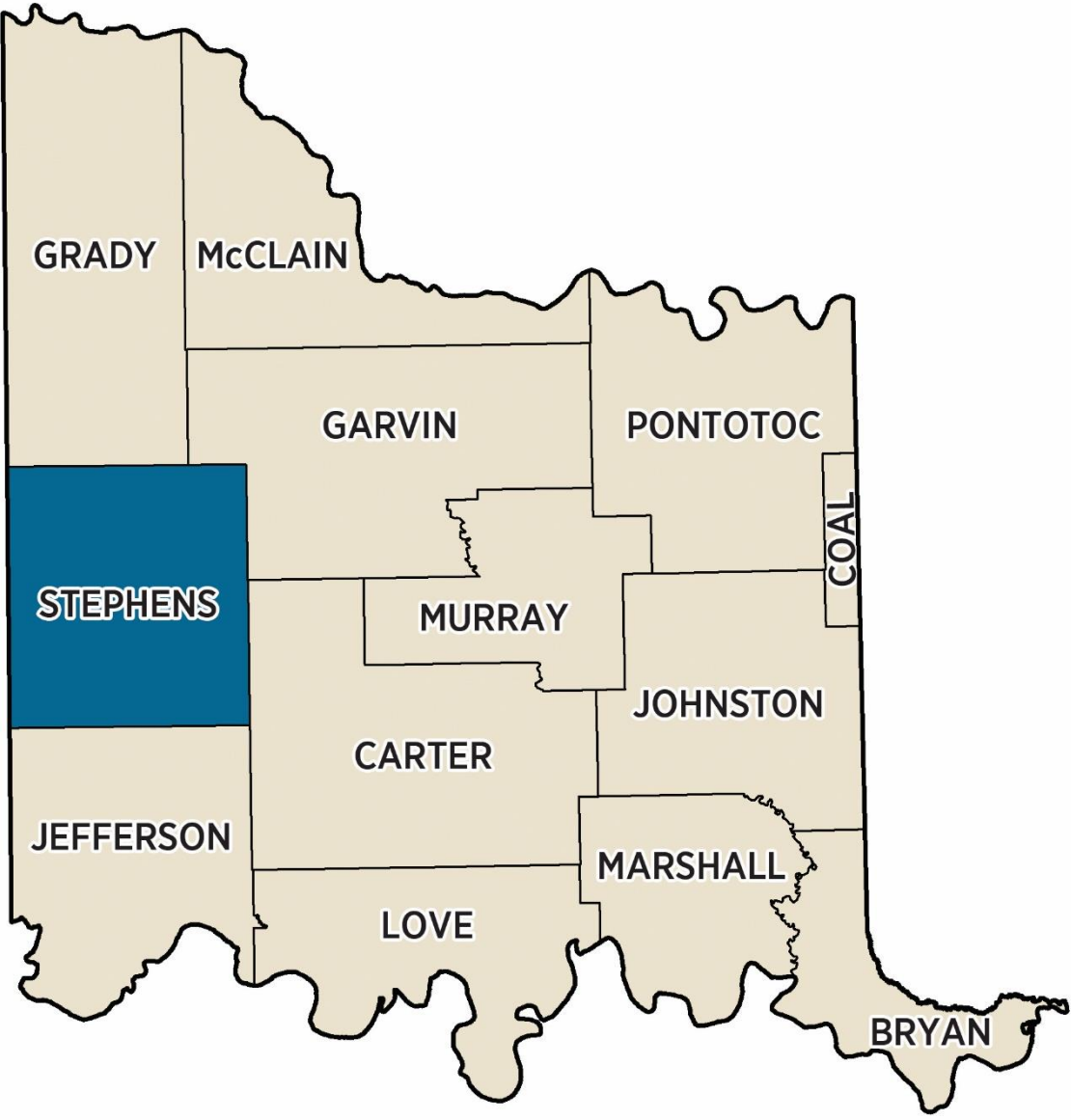


# Stephens County

## Tourism Development Plan



# 2021 Stephens County Tourism Assessment

## INTRODUCTION

---

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

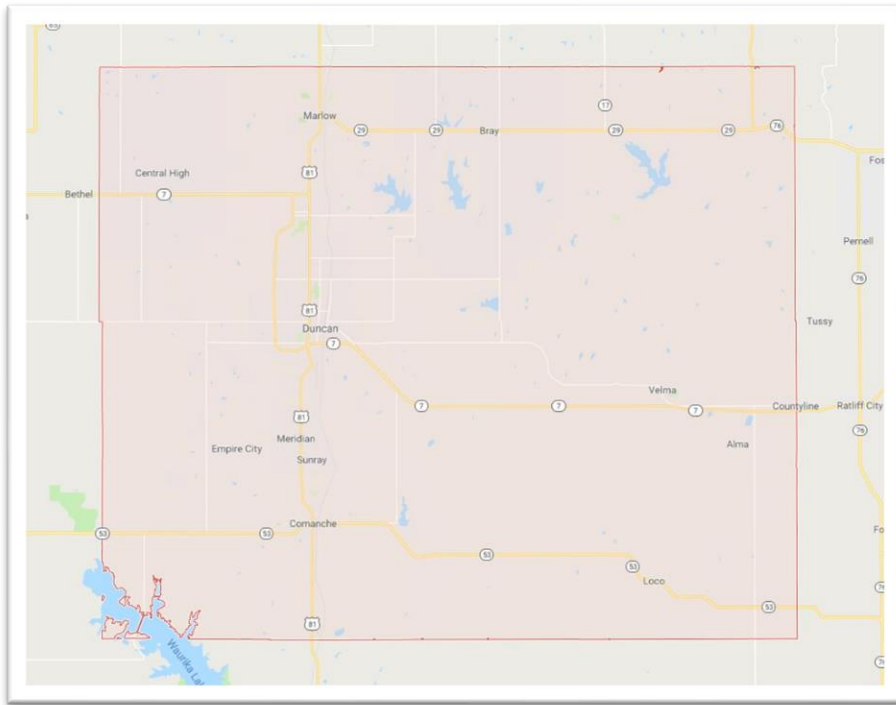
It is important to highlight that the plan was developed during an economically challenging time, for Stephens County and stakeholders within both the public and private sectors. To help anticipate financial and time commitments required in implementation, the plan includes recommended phasing. Strategies 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 Stephens 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 Stephens County Tourism Assessment, the Chickasaw Nation Tourism team considered the current state of the tourism market within Stephens County. The Dean Runyan Associates data indicates that Stephens County employed 980 tourism workers in 2018 and attracted \$59.4 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 Stephens County<sup>[4]</sup>*

**Current County Population: 43,143 (2019)<sup>[3]</sup>**

- Age 0-5            5.8%
- Age 6-18        23%
- Age 19-64      50.9%
- Ages 65+        20.3%
  
- Female            51.6%
- Male              48.4%

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

- April 2021      5%
- April 2020      13%
- April 2019      3.1%

**Cities with Tourism Product:**

- Duncan
- Marlow
- Comanche
- Bray
- Velma-Alma

**Current Economic Resources:<sup>[1-8]</sup>**

- Agribusiness
- Oil & Gas
- Mineral works
- University/college
- Medical centers
- Schools/education
- Annual community events
- Main Street shopping
- Parks/recreational

**Current Tourism Related Organizations:<sup>[6-8]</sup>**

- Marlow Chamber of Commerce
- Duncan Chamber of Commerce
- Duncan Main Street Authority
- Duncan Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Great Plains Country
- 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. According to 2018 Dean Runyan Associates data, the average overnight spend per person in Stephens County is \$59 and the average spend per person for a multiple night stay is \$141.

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 Stephens 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 Stephens 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 Stephens County represented approximately 5.5% of the county's total employment in 2018 and paid more than \$59.4 million in total wages in 2018<sup>11</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 Stephens 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 Stephens 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 Stephens County residents.

### Highly Functioning Tourism System

The assessment builds on the successes of previous tourism efforts put forth by the stakeholders within Stephens County, Chickasaw Country and the Chickasaw Nation. Strategies will be established to build on the strengths and weaknesses of Stephens County. As a result of this planned approach, Stephens 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 Stephens 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. Stephens County focuses promotional efforts around current strengths and opportunities of the county and establishes 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:

- Proximity to Lake Waurika (35 min away)
- Proximity to metropolitan area (Lawton)
- Camping, hunting and fishing
- Rural, undeveloped land
- Annual events
- Red River Technology Center
- Oil and gas industry
- Authentic atmosphere
- Well-developed Main Streets
- Gaming
- Western Heritage
- Community Infrastructure
- Stephens County Fairgrounds

### Weaknesses:

- Limited attractions
- Limited marketing efforts
- Limited accommodations
- Limited dining establishments
- Limited night life
- High crime rate

### Opportunities:

- Rivers, lakes and parks
- Strong county organizations to promote the area
- Education
- Undeveloped land available for tourism development

- Native American history
- County history
- Advance the fine arts sector within county

Threats:

- Limited job opportunities
- Unpredictable Oil & Gas industry
- State funding for county-wide marketing organizations
- Weather (severe droughts)

### 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 Stephens 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:
  - Chisholm Trail Casino
  - Chickasaw Area Office
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - Main Street Shopping & Boutiques
  - Duncan Lake
  - Clear Creek Lake
  - Lake Humphrey
  - Lake Fuqua
  - Chisholm Trail Heritage Center
  - Chisholm Trail Arts Council (CTAC) Art Gallery
  - Simmons Center/Convention Space
  - Stephens County Fairgrounds
  - Stephens County Historical Museum
  - 905 Railroad Museum
  - Palace Theatre
  - Redbud Park
  - Wedding venues

Accommodations	Number of Rooms	Average Weekend Occupancy %	Average Weekday Occupancy %	Average Cost
Hotels, Motels & Inns	604	75%	62%	\$89.45
Cabins & Lodging	4	50%	25%	\$800.00
RV's & Campgrounds	230	78%	78%	\$35.00

*\*Data collected as of November 2021 [9-20]*

**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 Stephens 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
  - Land, rivers and lakes nearby
  - Atmosphere
  - Main street shopping
  - Stephens County events
  - Red River Technology Center
  - Community parks and walking trail

### 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 three (3) “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: <sup>[6-8]</sup>

- Tribal Assets:
  - N/A
- Non-Tribal Assets:
  - Marlow Brothers Cave
  - Chisholm Trail Ruts
  - Ghost Towns (Loco, Meridian & Sunray, OK)

## Overview of Goal & Strategies

---

### Goals

- Goal 1: Identify potential tourism assets within county for possible development.
  - Strategy: County stakeholders to collaborate in the identification of tourism assets within Stephens County.
- 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: Identify potential tourism assets within county for possible development.

Strategy: County stakeholders to collaborate in the identification of tourism assets within Stephens County.

- Rationale – This goal and strategy is important to the county in order to assist with future development decisions to encourage tourism to the area.
- Approach – Determine individual or entity responsible for developing report and assessment. Determine necessary data based off feedback from stakeholders and determine distribution process.
- Tasks – Determine planning committee and develop list of desired tourism assets within county. Develop report formatting and business plans for presentation to potential investors.
  - Timeline – 12 months.
  - Resources – Planning committee, community stakeholders, investors, Oklahoma tourism reports (for data information).



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 SWOT 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

---

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

### Demographics

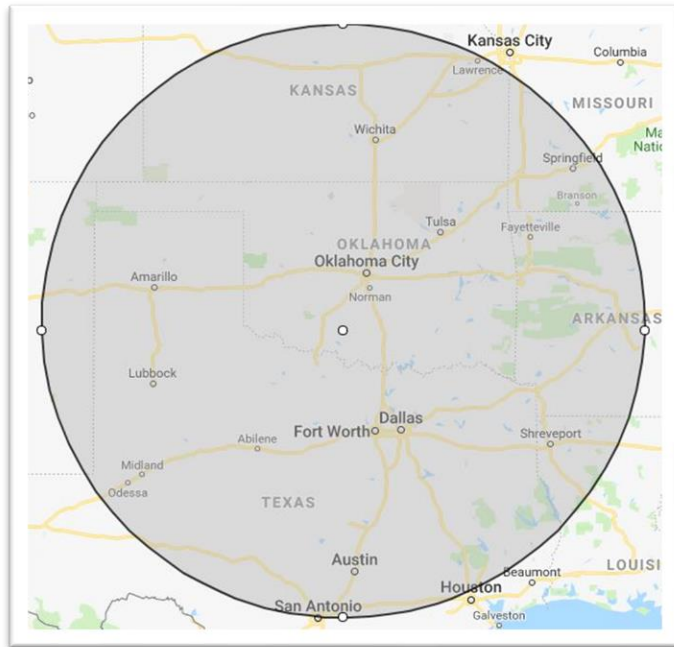
---

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 Stephens County target market: <sup>[6-8]</sup>

- 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 Stephens 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 Stephens County [2]*

- **Oklahoma**
  - Entire State
- **Texas**
  - Dallas/Ft. Worth
  - North Texas
  - Abilene
  - Austin
  - San Antonio
  - Houston
- **Kansas**
  - Wichita
  - Hutchinson
  - Lawrence
- **Missouri**
  - Springfield
  - Branson
- **International**
  - Canada
  - Mexico
  - Germany
  - Australia
- **Arkansas**
  - Fort Smith
  - Texarkana
  - Hot Springs

## Other Customer Segments

### Niche Markets: [6-8]

- Native American & Western Heritage enthusiasts
- Hunters and fishermen
- Unique festival seekers
- Outdoor & small-town adventurers
- Local shopping lovers
- Ghost town seekers
- Bed & Breakfast stayers
- Family travel

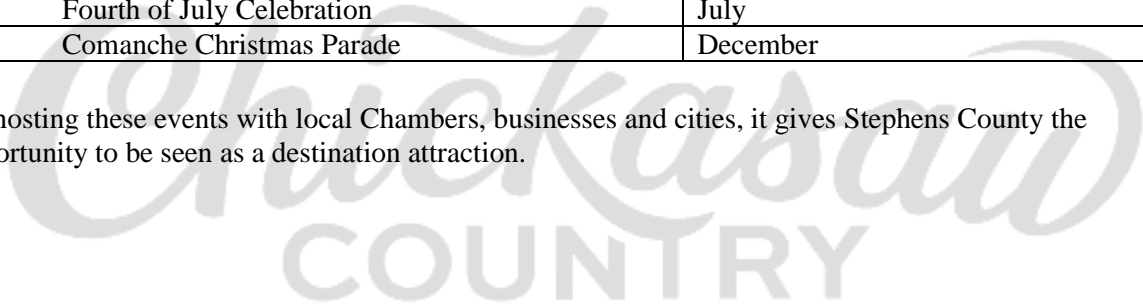
## EVENTS

Stephens 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 Stephens County hosted the following annual events:

CITY / EVENT	TIME OF YEAR
Duncan	
Marlow Winter Classic	January
Little Britches Rodeo	January
Sigma Nu Bull Riding	January
Monster Truck Wars	January
Red River Showdown Go-Kart Racing	January
Tri-K Barrel Race	February
Stephens County Jr. Livestock Show	February
Annual Stephens County Coin Show	February
Oklahoma Horse Fair	February
CTAC Youth Art Month	March
Garden Circus	March
Youth Art Month at the CTHC	March
Stephens County Swap Meet	March
Easter Egg Hunt (Multiple)	March/April
Annual Model Train Club Open House	April
HOYRA Rodeo	April
TwoBulls Challenge	April
Spring Stroll	May
Chisholm Trail Poke Run	May
Paint in the Park	May
GOP Fish Fry	May
Peruvian Horse Show	May
Annual Cops and Bobbers	June
ABBI American Heritage	June
Friday Night Car Cruise	June
Cruisin the Chisholm Trail	June
National Barrel Racers Oklahoma Championships	June
MHBA/MHYF Jr. National Show	June
World's Largest Garage Sale	July
CTAC Arts Explosion	July
National Day of the Cowboy	July
The Dehydrator	July
Cade Roth and the Black Sheep	July
Oklahoma Boer Goat Assoc's Summer Classic	July
Main Street Flea Market	July
Jason Boland & the Stragglers	July
Fiesta in Fuqua	August
Summer Stroll	August
Annual United Way BBQ Showdown	August
Western Spirit Celebration	September
CPA's Skipper Voss Let's Get Western 2!	September

CAF AirPower History Tour	September
Evolution TwoBulls Yearling Feature	September
Wine'n on the Chisholm Trail Festival	September
Legends Sale & Futurity	September
Simmons Center's Annual Craft Show	September
National Swine Registry's Fall Classic	October
Bark in the Park	October
Boo Review	October
RAM Prairie Circuit Finals	October
Simmons Center's Annual Fall Festival	October
Reining in the Arts	November
Veterans Parade	November
Comedy & Coffee	November
Holiday Stroll	November
Shop Small Saturday	November
Christmas Parade	December
Marlow	
Independence Day Celebration	July
Christmas Parade	December
Comanche	
Fourth of July Celebration	July
Comanche Christmas Parade	December

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



## RESOURCES

---

- 1) Dean Runyan Associates (December 2019). Oklahoma Travel Impacts. Retrieved from <https://ds8hblldo2z4gr.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 Stephens County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stephenscountyoklahoma,US/PST045219>
- 4) Google Maps
- 5) Economic Research (2021). Unemployment Rate in Stephens County, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/OKBRYA3URN>
- 6) Visit Duncan. (February 2017). <http://www.visitduncan.org/>
- 7) Stephens CountyOK.com. (February 2017) <http://www.stephenscountyok.com/>
- 8) Personal Communication, 2017; Erin Spencer, Duncan CVB

*Chickasaw*  
COUNTRY

- 9) Overnight Accommodations: Chisholm Trail RV Park; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 10) Overnight Accommodations: Days Inn; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 11) Overnight Accommodations: Derrick Motel; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 12) Overnight Accommodations: Duncan Inn; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 13) Overnight Accommodations: Fairfield Inn & Suites; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 14) Overnight Accommodations: Hampton Inn; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 15) Overnight Accommodations: Hat Top Ranch; Personal Communication, November 2021
- 16) Overnight Accommodations: Heritage Inn; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 17) Overnight Accommodations: Hillcrest Motel; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 18) Overnight Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 19) Overnight Accommodations: Lindley House Garden Cottages; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 20) Overnight Accommodations: Quality Inn; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 21) Overnight Accommodations: Century Inn; Personal Communication, June 2021
- 22) Overnight Accommodations: Shady Oaks Lakeview RV Park; Personal Communication, June 2021

