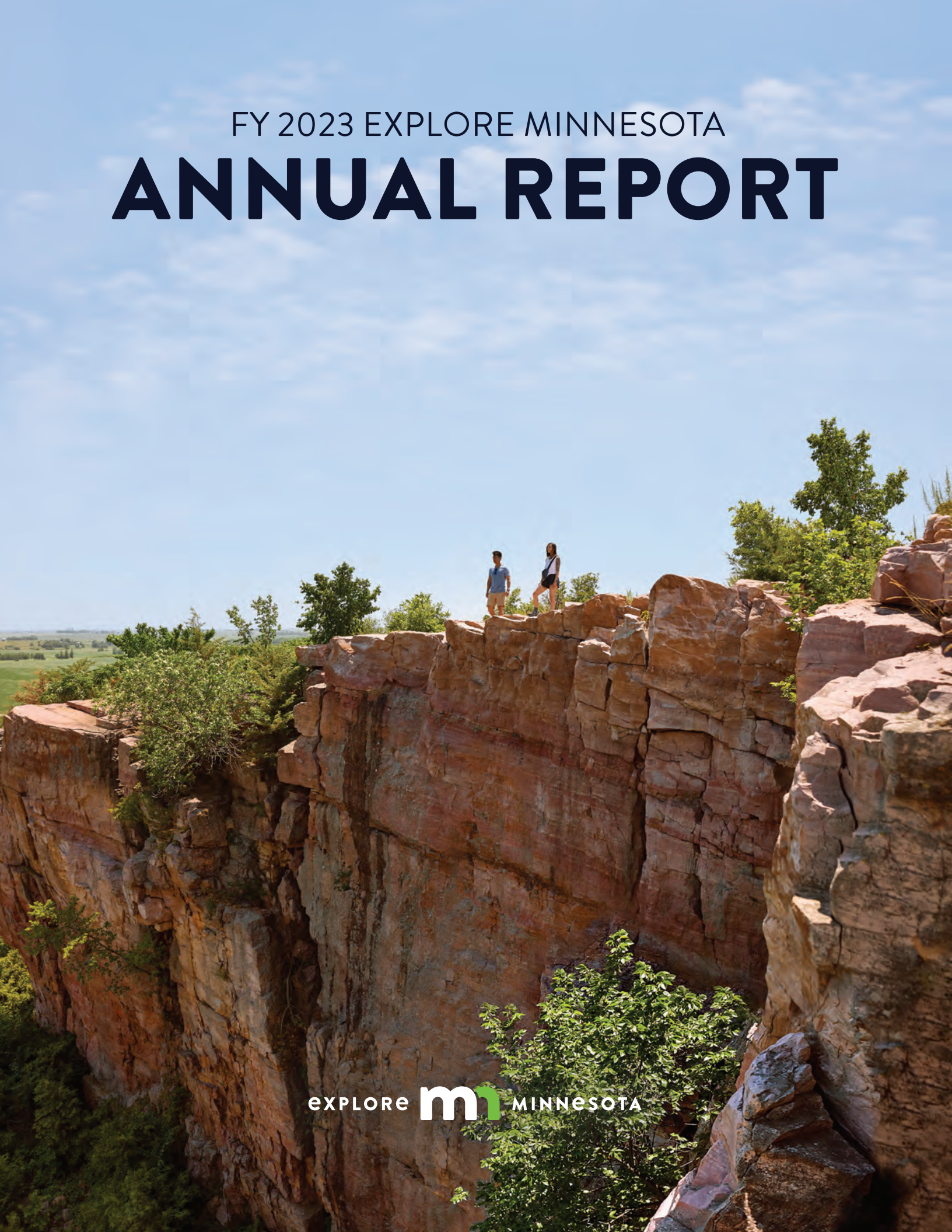


FY 2023 EXPLORE MINNESOTA

ANNUAL REPORT





- 01 Introduction
- 04 Grow Minnesota's Visitor Economy
- 20 Creating a Welcoming Experience for All Visitors
- 24 Maximizing Partner and Stakeholder Leadership and Collaboration
- 30 Foster Destination Stewardship, Ensure Organizational Excellence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

What a year it's been. With your help and guidance, we kicked off a brand-new strategic plan. We focused more on what's next for Explore Minnesota and how to move the office into a bigger, brighter future.

As you'll see, we've accomplished a great deal in the last fiscal year. You'll also see a new fresh format for our annual report. We found that we had so much to celebrate that it was impossible to fit into just two pages.

While FY23 still focused on recovery efforts, several programs moved into a growth mode.

We saw renewed interest in Minnesota both nationally and internationally. We've taken significant time to set new strategy, whether that was through new marketing efforts to new audiences, revamping our website and rethinking our content or connecting more to the communities around the state. We are growing our connections to better promote our great state.

We continued to better define how Minnesota measures up as a top-10 state and saw increased interest in traveling to the state among our regional competitors. We are proud to be a top choice for travelers who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community and who are looking for leisure activities that are accessible to travelers of all abilities. We also have solid benchmarks in several categories in which we were recognized as a top-15 state.

The cherry on top of FY23 was the passage of historic funding to Explore Minnesota. For the first time in a decade, we saw nearly \$4 million added to our base budget, \$11 million in onetime funding for new initiatives including grants for DMOs and Tribal Nations, more than \$6 million in grants for multicultural festivals and \$11 million in onetime funding to launch Explore Minnesota for Business. We know that economic development, talent attraction and livability marketing have become new responsibilities for tourism agencies in the state and the country, and we are embracing the opportunity to expand our efforts to promote this great state on an even bigger scale.

As we enter our next fiscal year, we are more motivated to try new approaches, take on new challenges and opportunities, and show the rest of the world what Minnesota has to offer. While FY23 was a great year, we know that FY24 will be even better, and we can't wait to take it on with all of you.



Lauren Bennett McGinty, Director

STAFF**EXECUTIVE TEAM**

Executive Director
Lauren Bennett McGinty

Government Relations Supervisor
Lyndsey Hanson

HR Director
Roxanne Lane

DESTINATION MARKETING

Deputy Director
Kat Sutton

Research Analyst
Gretchen Nussbaum

Marketing

Senior Manager
Leann Kispert

Partnership Strategist
Glori Rantz

Coordinator
Jared Laabs

Communications / Media Relations

Manager
Chris Morgan

Senior Graphic Designer
Melanie Graves

Digital Strategy

Manager
Devon Cox

Digital & Social Strategist
Caitlin Hannah

Digital Content Strategist + Editor
Andrew Parks

Newsletter Mgmt / Office Support
Chris Lawton

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Deputy Director
Beth Helle

Industry Relations

Metro Regional Coordinator
Michael Hernandez

Northeast Regional Coordinator
Derek Ramthun

Northwest / Central Regional Coordinator
Nicole Lalum

Southern Regional Coordinator
Lisa Havelka

Market Development

Manager
Cheryl Offerman

International Media Relations
Jake Juliot

Welcome Centers

Network Supervisor
Julie Ramer

Distribution Coordinator
David Robb

Extranet / Travel Counselor Support
Anne Paterson

Northern Welcome Center Supervisor
Gail Walkowiak

Southern Welcome Center Supervisor
Linda Vucich

Lead Worker
Ben Vucich

Lead Worker
Stephen Sarvi

Customer Service Specialist
JR Helget

Customer Service Specialist
Ruth Olson

Customer Service Specialist
Gloria DeBenedet

Customer Service Specialist
Sally Lundholm

Customer Service Specialist
Robin Allen

OPERATIONS**Office & Admin Services**

Accounting Officer
Amy Draskowski

Buyer
Sandy Karnowski

Operations

Senior Manager
Mike Meyer

Operations / Agency Reporting
Melissa DonCarlos

Technical Support
Sean Lydon

Contract Specialist
Dawn Bushman

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

VISION: To be a top 10 destination for extraordinary travel in all four seasons.

MISSION: We support Minnesota's economy and promote sustainable travel by welcoming all to experience our diverse cultures and destinations through innovative marketing, industry partnerships and unique storytelling.

VALUES: Teamwork, creativity, agility and inclusivity.

POSITION: We lead Minnesota's travel industry by collaborating with partners and stakeholders to market our state for the economic benefit of all Minnesotans.

STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GROW MINNESOTA'S VISITOR ECONOMY

Increase the total visitation to Minnesota and the economic impact of tourism and jobs created by tourism.

CREATE A WELCOMING EXPERIENCE FOR ALL VISITORS

Increase the number of diverse vendors used, spend in diverse markets, content celebrating diverse cultures and foster relationships with underserved, cultural and heritage communities.

MAXIMIZE PARTNER AND STAKEHOLDER LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Increase private and in-kind stakeholder contributions, grow stakeholder participation in our programs, prioritize opportunistic and partnership marketing.

FOSTER DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

Conduct a destination assessment, build partnerships with governmental agencies to identify areas of growth/sustainability where tourism intersects, create new educational opportunities around maintaining cultural, environmental and economic integrity of Minnesota's tourism destinations.

ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Prioritize employee growth through educational opportunities, improve employee satisfaction in the annual survey, develop objectives and key results for all projects, create a plan for increased employee engagement and establish an organizational structure that is future-focused.



GROW MINNESOTA'S VISITOR ECONOMY

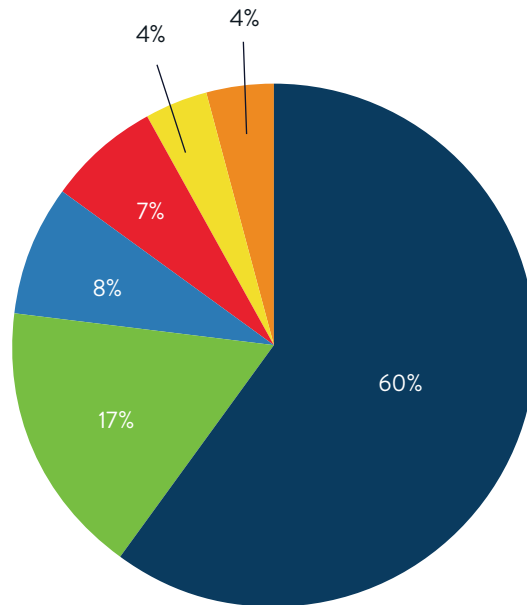
ANNUAL BUDGET

General fund operating budget for FY23: **\$14.4 million**

PRIVATE INDUSTRY MATCH

Cash	\$1.85 million
In kind	\$7.2 million
Total	\$9.05 million

Allocation of Budget



- Marketing & Communications
- Technology & Operations*
- Industry Outreach
- Marketing Grants and Co-ops
- Market Development
- Welcome Centers

*Includes website contract

FEDERAL FUNDING

In January 2022, the State of Minnesota was awarded a COVID-Recovery grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for \$9,194,450 to promote tourism to the state. Of that, Explore Minnesota received \$4,145,987.

Explore Minnesota used this incremental funding to bolster and extend tourism marketing and support industry growth. We updated research on audience segments, conducted new travel profiles, return-on-investment and economic impact research projects to better benchmark the recovery. We also executed a study on traveler intent and ROI at our welcome centers.

The funding allowed us to expand our winter campaign, create an immersive experiential activation for growth markets, and activate on opportunistic buys such as a billboard in Times Square the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve. Increased media funding expanded our regional marketing footprint to include Utah, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, as well as deepen our roster of media tactics, including diversity media. Budgets for national niche campaigns increased by approximately 143% year-over-year, increasing our exposure to new audiences.

Category	Amount
Marketing	\$3,569,630
Research	\$411,527
Strategic Planning	\$100,000
Staffing	\$64,830
Total	\$4,145,987

FY24/25 BUDGET INCREASE SECURED & POSITIONED FOR FUTURE GROWTH

At the end of the 2023 Legislative Session, Explore Minnesota received more funding than ever before for the FY24-25 biennium. The support for the office and the recognition of need positions us to see significant growth over the next several years.

- Increasing Explore Minnesota's base budget from \$14.4 million to \$18.3 million in FY24, plus another \$746,000 in FY25 to support the growth of existing programs.
- \$11 million in onetime funding to support new initiatives to create a welcoming experience for all visitors and support the local tourism economy.
- \$11 million in onetime funding to develop Explore Minnesota for Business—a division aimed at marketing the livability and economic opportunities of Minnesota.
- Additional pass-thru funding to support the Taste of Minnesota, Stairstep Foundation Cultural Festivals, Ka Joog Cultural Festivals, Westside Boosters Cultural Festivals, Hmong Freedom Festivals, Somali Museum Cultural Festivals and Minnesota Sports and Events.

ECONOMIC IMPACT



Leisure & Hospitality Sales
\$15.7 BILLION

in 2021 according to MDOR



Spending
\$43 MILLION

spending per day in 2021



Revenue
\$998 MILLION

in taxes generated in 2021
according to MDOR

**TOURISM ACCOUNTS FOR 14.2%
OF TOTAL STATE SALES TAX REVENUE**

IMPACT ON MINNESOTANS



Visitors
76.6 MILLION

in 2022*

\$985
in taxes saved per household by
visitor-generated taxes*

Passengers
31.2 MILLION
passengers at MSP airport in 2022
according to Minneapolis Saint Paul
Metropolitan Airports Commission



Jobs
229K JOBS

in 2022 according to U.S. Bureau
of Labor Statistics

9.5%
private sector employment

Wages
\$5.9 BILLION
in wages in 2022 according to U.S.
Bureau of Labor Statistics

*New additions for 2022 from Tourism Economics

KEY AREAS FOR GROWTH

GROWING VISITATION WHERE IT MATTERS

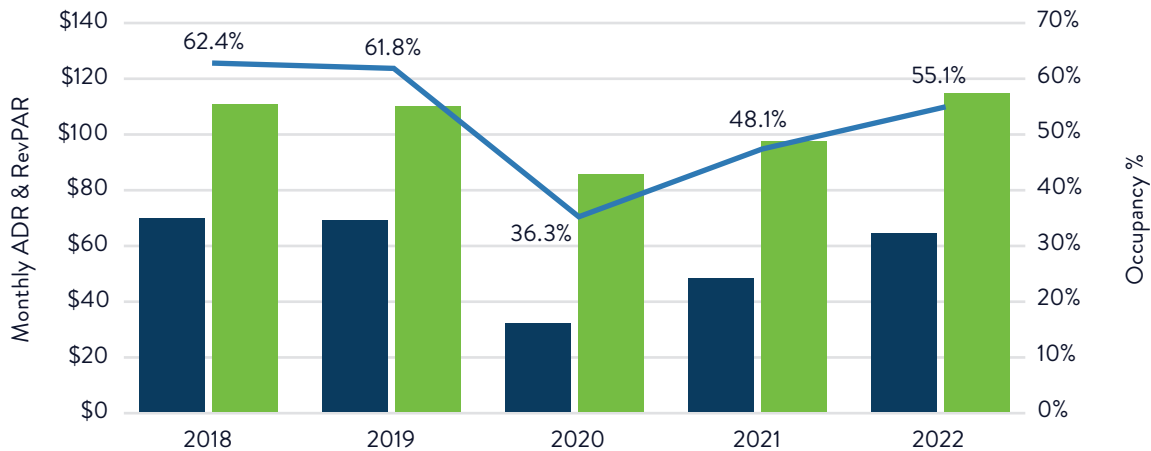
Minnesota had an average monthly hotel occupancy rate of 55.1% in 2022. This is above the 2021 average occupancy of 48.1% and below 62.4% occupancy in 2018.

Similarly, the 2022 average monthly hotel RevPAR of \$66.80 is above the 2021 RevPAR of \$49.93 and below the 2019 and below \$72.45 RevPAR in 2018.

The 2022 Minnesota ADR of \$119.36 was above the 2018 to 2021 ADRs of \$89.13 to \$115.26.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY

STR Minnesota Hotel Performance Metrics
2019-2022 Annual Average Comparison



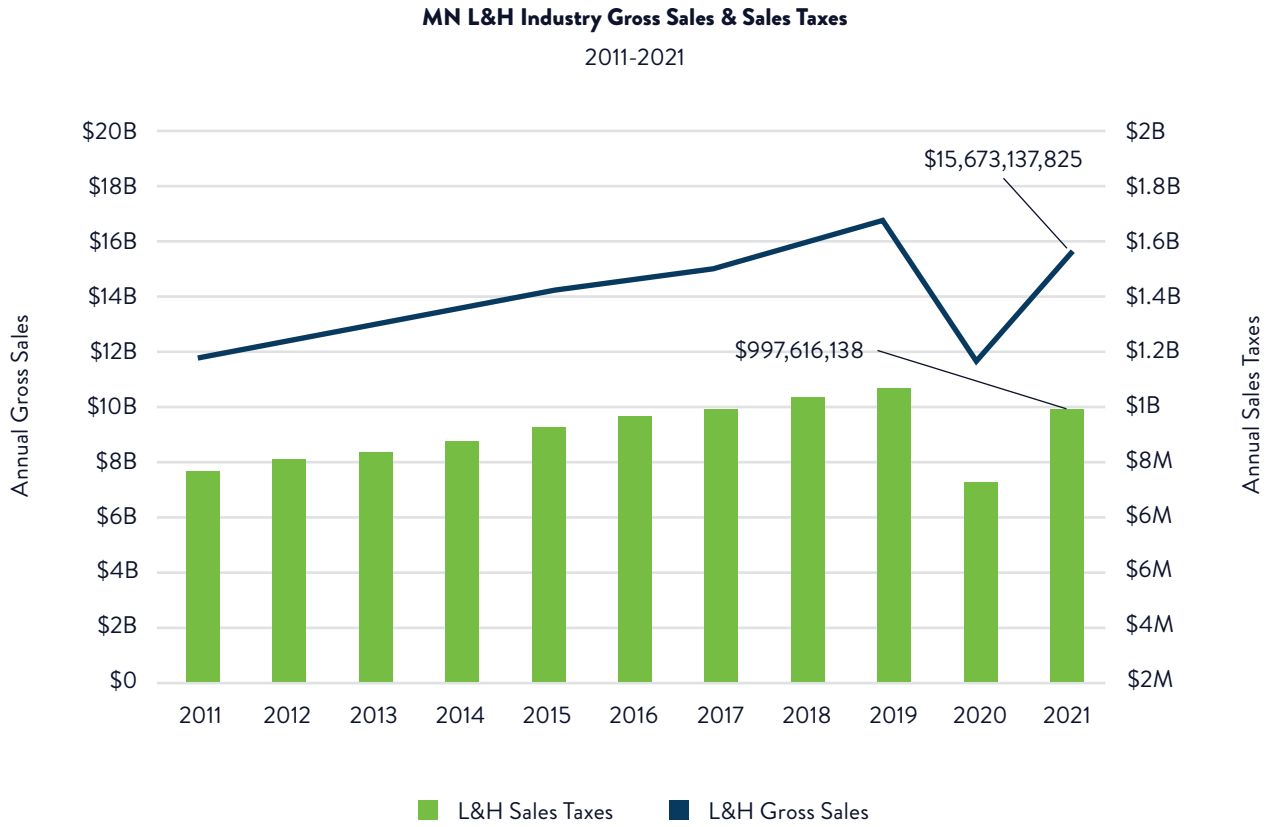
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
■ ADR*	\$72.45	\$71.64	\$33.29	\$49.93	\$66.80
■ RevPAR**	\$115.26	\$114.57	\$89.13	\$101.33	\$119.36
■ Occupancy %	62.40%	61.8%	36.3%	48.1%	55.1%

Note: Some numbers compiled in our FY23 Year in Review can only be reported on a calendar basis. Some final numbers for the calendar year 2023 will be reported in the FY24 Year in Review.

*ADR: Average Daily Rate;

**RevPAR; Revenue Per Available Room

SEEING INDUSTRY RECOVERY



MN L&H Gross Sales of \$15.7 billion in 2021 are 5.5% below \$16.6 billion in 2019 and 34.4% above \$11.7 billion in 2020.

Similarly, MN L&H State Sales Taxes of \$998 million in 2021 are 6.9% below \$1.07 billion in 2019 and 36.5% above \$731 million in 2020.

INSPIRING A DREAM TRIP TO A DREAM STATE

In our FY23 marketing campaign, we invited travelers to revisit the magic of travel. We drew them to Minnesota by reminding them that travel can provide an escape into another world, create magical moments and allow you to experience the extraordinary. We transported the audience through first-person storytelling so potential travelers could experience Minnesota through the eyes and memories of fellow travelers.

Seasonal media strategies included a broad regional campaign covering the Midwest, along with additional key markets by season. A national digital media strategy behaviorally targeted travelers by their passion activities with niche campaigns. Diversity-focused media was integrated throughout all campaigns. Pilot media tests were also conducted in Dallas/Fort Worth, TX, and Atlanta, GA, selected for direct flight access and high levels of diverse travelers.

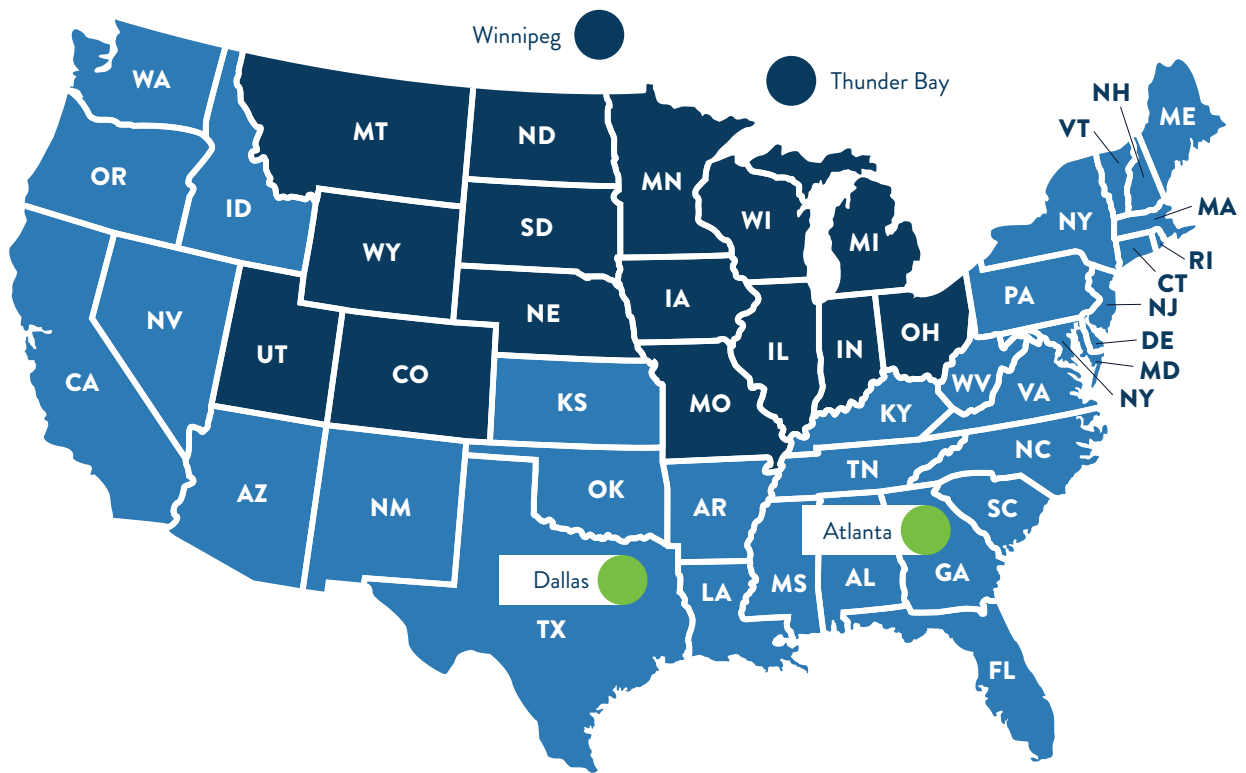
In FY23, our general as well as diversity marketing campaigns contributed to brand lift for Minnesota. This is measured annually by research conducted in partnership with Upwave, wherein we estimate brand lift in comparison to a control group. This allows us to better understand campaign impact on brand awareness, familiarity, and favorability among our target audiences.

General Campaign Brand Lift	FY23
Awareness	.3 point increase
Familiarity	3.7 point increase
Favorability	4.2 point increase

Diversity Campaign Brand Lift	FY23
Awareness	10.4 point increase
Familiarity	6.5 point increase
Favorability	11.7 point increase

Source: Brand Campaign Measurement Methodology. Upwave. 2023.

FY23 Annual Campaign Map

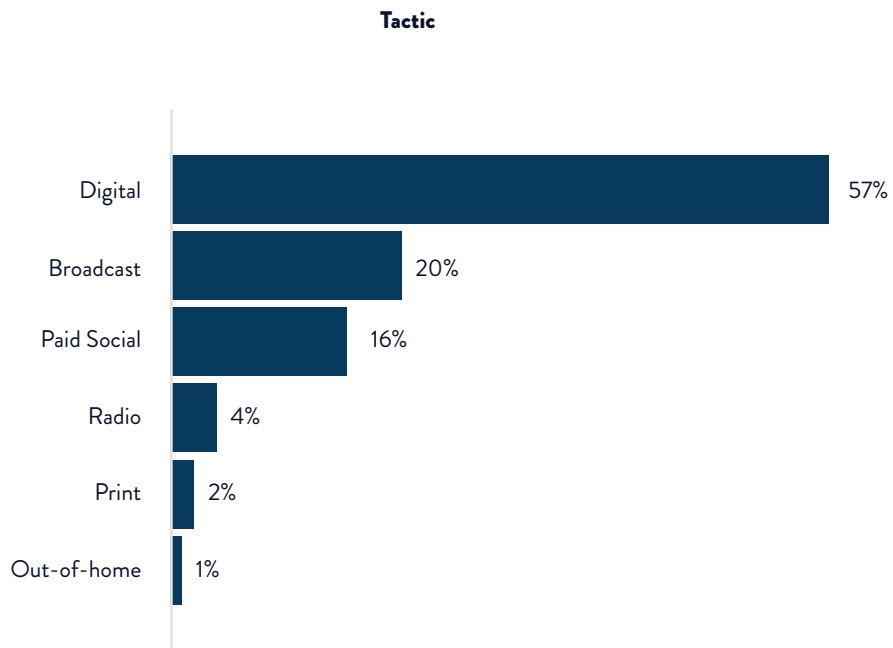
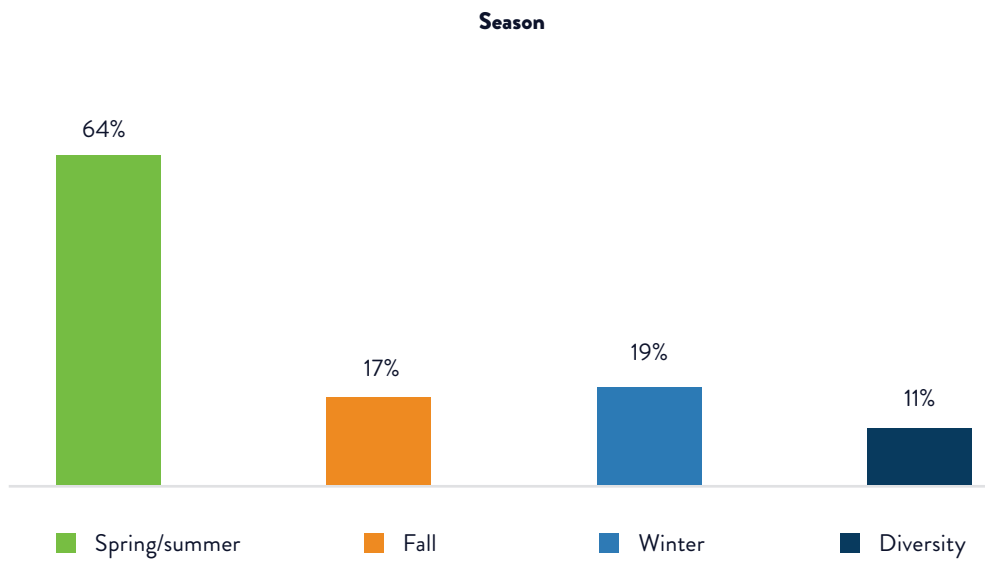


General + Diversity + Niche Markets
 Niche Expansion Markets
 Flight + Diversity Markets

Niches for FY23:

- Fall '22: Hiking, Biking
- Winter '22-'23: Performing Arts, Winter Recreation
- Spring/Summer '23: National Parks, Events, Food & Drink

ADVERTISING MEDIA SPEND BREAKOUTS:

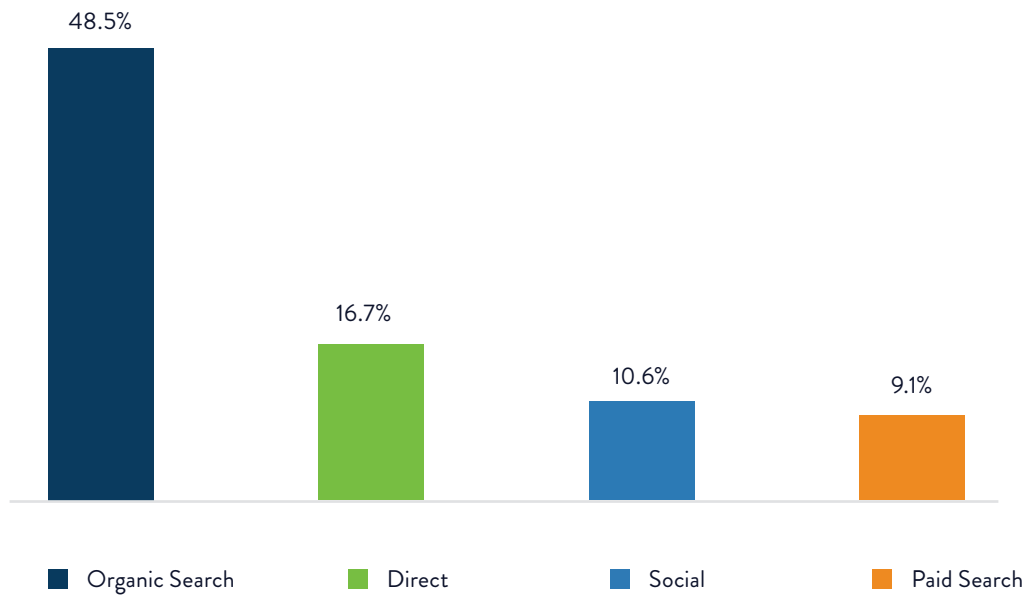



WEBSITE STATS

Compared to FY22


Sessions	7,760,638	+13.2%
Bounce Rate	59.85%	+0.3%
Pageviews	13,746,686	+13.78%
Partner Referrals	796,862	+ 6%

Top Traffic Sources







Top organic search term:
"BOUNDARY WATERS"




Top age group:
35-44



Gender mix:
55.3% FEMALE
44.7% MALE



Top Cities (outside of MN):
Chicago, Dallas, New York,
Denver, Milwaukee



Top Interests:
Media & Entertainment (Movie &
TV Lovers), News & Politics (Avid
News Readers)

FROM A TOP-10 STATE...

Explore Minnesota's vision is to be a top 10 destination in the United States for extraordinary travel in all four seasons. In FY23 we started to look at how we measure up.

WHO'S INTERESTED IN THE NORTH STAR STATE?

Among regional travelers* MN is a top ten state for:



Welcoming to travelers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning (LGBTQ+)



Water paddling activities such as canoeing and kayaking



Leisure experiences are accessible to travelers of all abilities

Among regional travelers* MN ranked as follows:



#14

Culinary trip



#11

Outdoor Recreation



#13

Golf



#13

Concerts or festivals



#12

National park sites and state parks



#13

Value vacation

SPREADING THE WORD

- 81 pieces of national and local coverage
- With an estimated audience reach of 2,276,338,267 over the fiscal year.
- Made 24 top-10 lists
- Placed on 16 top-20 lists

*Regional travelers defined as travelers from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, Utah, Wyoming, Winnipeg, Canada and Thunder Bay, Canada.

Source: SMARI 2023 Spring/Summer Ad Effectiveness Study

...TO INTERNATIONAL ICON

With international borders now open and travelers returning, Explore Minnesota recentered our focus around attracting international visitors to the state. Staff attended National Tour Association (NTA) TREX, American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace and Circle Wisconsin to meet with 89 US travel professionals/operators. Staff also attended US Travel's IPW in San Antonio, TX and conducted more than 110 appointments with global media and tour operators.

RE-START INTERNATIONAL MARKETING, SUPPORTED BY RMI AGENCY CONTRACT

In February 2023, we contracted RMI as our first international marketing agency of record. This strategic partnership comes after the state suspended most international marketing in 2020 due to the pandemic. The contract with RMI will support promotion efforts in the United Kingdom, as well as German (including Austria and Switzerland), and Benelux markets (Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg) and Nordic markets of Sweden and Norway, and France.



United Kingdom

- 1 radio promotion
- 2 print magazine promotions
- Reached a combined total of 183,000 print magazine readers, 352,000 listeners and 319,000 social media impacts.

The Benelux Countries

- Print magazine articles, newsletter promotions and social media campaigns
- We hosted a fishing writer and influencer who promoted the annual walleye fishing opener along with unique fishing locations throughout the state.
- Campaigns reached a combined total of 195,000 print magazine readers, 58,000 newsletter readers and 361,128 social media impacts.



Germany

- Campaigns were focused on social media, including Facebook and Instagram. We targeted travelers interested in nature and the outdoors while also showing opportunities for city stays.
- Reached 3,825,734 on social media, 120,215 newsletter readers
- Cooperative promotion with German travel trade generated.

FEATURE:

Minnesota received coverage in two major Dutch publications this year. The first spread was featured in Meridian Magazine, which has a print circulation of 90,000. The second story appeared in Beet Magazine, the number-one fishing magazine in The Netherlands, delivered nine times per year to more than one million readers.

Explore Minnesota also began distributing newsletters to international media to highlight what's new in Minnesota, as well as notable Minnesota events and accolades..

In cooperation with Brand USA, Explore Minnesota hosted four influencers from the UK in September 2022. Jess Elle King, Greg O'Shea, Kaz Kamwi and Molly Thomson all travelled to Minnesota and experienced some of the great attractions the state has to offer, including a Vikings Football game!



60 - Kijk op www.meridiantravel.nl

★★★
**ROADTRIP DOOR MINNESOTA
 DE VERBORGEN SCHAT
 VAN DE MIDWEST**
 ★★★

Reizen door Minnesota is als het ontdekken van een goed bewaard geheim. Deze staat in het Midwesten van de Verenigde Staten heeft alles wat je zoekt in een perfecte reisbestemming. Van bruisende steden als Minneapolis en St. Paul tot de rustige natuurlijke schoonheid van de Lutsen Mountains en Grand Marais, Minnesota heeft het allemaal.

TEKST EN FOTOGRAFIE HARALD KOLKMAN

Minnesota, ook wel bekend als 'Land van 10.000 meren', is een staat in het noorden van de Verenigde Staten. Het is de 32e staat die toetrad tot de Unie, en werd op 11 mei 1858 officieel erkend als staat. 'Minn' staat voor 'rollend water' en slaat natuurlijk op het stromende water van de Mississippi die in Minnesota ontspringt in Itasca State Park. Minnesota werd in 1849 een territorium van de Verenigde Staten. De komst van de spoorwegen naar Minnesota in de late 19e eeuw bracht grote veranderingen met zich mee. Het maakte de ontwikkeling van de landbouw en de industrie mogelijk, en leidde tot een explosieve groei van de bevolking in de steden langs de spoorlijnen.

Twin Cities

Ik begin mijn reis in de Twin Cities oftewel Minneapolis en St. Paul. In de late 19e eeuw begon de regio rond de Mississippi-rivier zich te ontwikkelen als een belangrijk centrum voor handel en transport. De stad Minneapolis werd een belangrijk knooppunt voor de handel in graan en andere gewassen uit het westen. St. Paul werd een belangrijk centrum voor transport en

scheepvaart. In 1867 werd de eerste spoorbrug over de Mississippi-rivier gebouwd, waardoor de handel tussen de twee steden gemakkelijker werd.

Invloedrijk Minneapolis

Tussen 1830 en 190 was de stad Minneapolis een van de meest invloedrijke en welvarendste steden in de Verenigde Staten vanwege het gebruik van de kracht van de waterval in de Mississippi-rivier. De waterval, nu bekend als de St. Anthony Falls, bood een overvloedige en betrouwbare bron van waterkracht die kon worden gebruikt om machines en fabrieken aan te drijven. In de late 19e eeuw en vroege 20e eeuw werd Minneapolis een centrum van de meelfabriekindustrie. Ik breng een bezoek aan het Mill City Museum, een fascinerend museum dat de geschiedenis van de bloeiende meelfabrieken van Minneapolis laat zien. Het museum bevindt zich in de ruïnes van een oude fabriek aan de Mississippi-rivier en biedt bezoekers een interactieve ervaring. Bezoekers kunnen onder andere een kijkje nemen in de werkplaatsen, oude machines bekijken, een virtuele reis maken door de

Kijk op www.meridiantravel.nl - 61



Prachtige natuur, de meer dan 10.000 meren, de machtige Mississippi rivier die hier vanuit het Itascameer ontspringt, maar vooral de sportvisserij die hier letterlijk tot in de haarvaten van de samenleving is doorgedrongen: hier móet je minimaal eens in je leven geweest zijn!



MAKING THE MOST OF OUR SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

While some statistics were down year-over-year due to algorithm changes within Meta, our primary platform of focus (Instagram) saw a 126% increase in engagements. We cultivated this by narrowing our scope and posting highly engaging photos and short-form vertical videos that focused on our audience's areas of interest. Utilizing a mix of original, user-generated, and influencer content, our Instagram engagement rate per an impression soared past the industry average of 0.91%*. In FY24, we are planning on taking an expanded, yet curated approach - building on this year's successes to more deeply invest in both established and emerging platforms.

Instagram

Impressions	13,186,977	Down 17.5% from FY22
Engagements	238,892	Up 126% from FY22
Engagement Rate Per Impression	1.8%	Up 173.9% from FY22

Facebook

Impressions	84,023,654	Up 12.1% from FY22
Engagements	3,035,170	Down 2% from FY22
Engagement Rate Per Impression	3.6%	Down 12.6% from FY22

Twitter

Impressions	439, 614	Up 8.2% from FY22
Engagements	8,470	Up 34.8% from FY22
Engagement Rate Per Impression	1.9%	Up 24.6% from FY22

Total

Impressions	97,650,248	Up 6.9% from FY22
Engagements	3,283,746	Up 2.3% from FY22
Engagement Rate Per Impression	3.4%	Down 4.3% from FY22

*2023 Social Industry Benchmarks study from Social Insider: socialinsider.io/blog/social-media-industry-benchmarks/#12

TRAVELING THE STATE – PASSPORT OPTIONAL

Throughout FY23 we supported several statewide passports to help prop up local businesses. These mobile maps are free to participants and help bring valuable economic impact to communities throughout Minnesota. Travelers could check in for discounts and are entered into sweepstakes throughout the year.



Landing Page Views	92,419
Passport Registrations	8,130
Passport Redemptions	3,443
Explore Minnesota E-news Opt-ins	3,942

Landing Page Views	94,504
Passport Registrations	14,808
Passport Redemptions	1,413
Explore Minnesota E-news Opt-ins	6,543

Landing Page Views	66,105
Passport Registrations	5,210
Passport Redemptions	387
Explore Minnesota E-news Opt-ins	2,928

ADDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP CAMPAIGNS

We are also proud to partner with companies and organizations, both local and national, to amplify our marketing efforts. Notable partnerships in FY23 include:



SHARING THE MN LOVE ACROSS THE REGION

In the summer of 2022, we invited potential visitors to experience the magic of Minnesota, even from far away. The immersive pop-up [Dream State experience](#) took place during the Fourth of July in Chicago's Maggie Daley Park and at the Pride celebration in downtown St. Louis, Missouri.



The video-rich pop-up allowed visitors to traverse Minnesota without leaving their state. Visitors could enter a sweepstakes form to win a set of decorative oars or a five-day vacation to Minnesota! Brand ambassadors helped answer questions, engage with visitors and handed out destination stickers and branded water bottles.

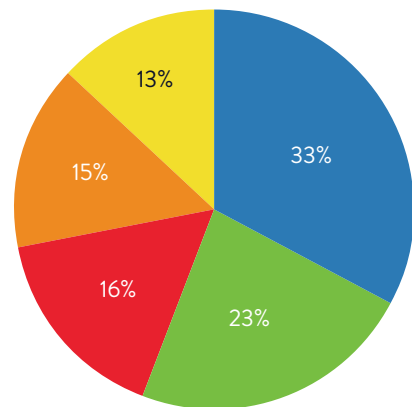
We generated repeat impressions via the website, social media, post-event email and geotargeted advertising. We also partnered with influencers, ran ads around the event and activated some high-profile PR.

The pop-up saw nearly 5,000 visitors, generated over 23.4 million digital impressions and 476k in social engagements.

CO-OPERATIVELY MARKETING MINNESOTA

- 150 industry participants placed over 400 ads
- Industry spending in FY23 program: \$698,794
 - » **An increase of 29% YoY**
- In-kind value from co-op contractors/media partners: \$1,783,552
 - » **An increase of 24% YoY**
- Explore Minnesota investment in FY23: \$551,721
- Participants were 67% DMO's, 33% Other tourism-related businesses

Co-Op Program Participation by Region



- Northeast
- Metro
- Northwest
- Southern
- Central



**CREATING A
WELCOMING
EXPERIENCE FOR
ALL VISITORS**



Growing Interest Through Increased Diversity Spending

In FY23, marketing diversity accounted for 11% of overall media expenditures. We focused significantly on attracting Black, Latino and LGBTQ+ travelers. Media buys included Spanish language ads, content partnerships with Afar magazine and Q, digital, print and digital with Lavender magazine, as well as social segmenting, display and digital video.

Being Yourself in Minnesota

In 2022, Explore Minnesota invested in a photoshoot to highlight all of the amazing accessible options we have for visitors. From indoor rock climbing to our incredible Minnesota Zoo, we featured real Minnesotans of various abilities taking in the sights. Moving forward, Explore Minnesota will include these images and videos in every campaign we do, giving people of all abilities the opportunity to see themselves traveling to and around Minnesota.



Highlighting Accessibility in Multiple Ways

We also put in more work than ever making accessible places easier to find on exploreminnesota.com. We went from the ability to sort features from one accessibility option to 26, and the list continues to grow.

Tribal Nation Engagement

After working with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to host the first Governor's Fishing Opener hosted by a Tribal Nation, we continued to broaden our engagement with the 11 Tribal Nations across Minnesota.



In FY23, staff held tourism discovery meetings with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, and White Earth Nation of the Minnesota Chippewa.

Explore Minnesota is also expanding a partnership with the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA)—the nation's DMO for Indian Country - in order to provide more resources for Tribal Nations within Minnesota for tourism product development and promotion. In October, Explore Minnesota attended the 2022 AIANTA American Indian Tourism conference.

In FY24, Explore Minnesota will have significant grant dollars available to the 11 Tribal Nations to support tourism development programs in their communities.



Welcoming Travelers from Across All Borders

In FY 23, Explore Minnesota worked with the University of Minnesota Tourism Center to conduct a Welcome Center research project surveying visitor volume, visitor experience, the impact on traveler behavior and overall ROI.

WELCOME CENTERS/VISITOR SERVICES

Explore Minnesota's Welcome Center program exists to service travelers with information, facilitating travel throughout the state. State-operated welcome centers are located in Minnesota Department of Transportation buildings at key entry points around the state:

- 6 state-run welcome centers: Albert Lea, Beaver Creek, Dresbach, Moorhead, St. Croix, Thompson Hill
- 4 Partner centers: Fisher's Landing, Grand Portage, St. Cloud, Worthington
- 50+ Affiliate Centers

Visitor Services (Explore Minnesota operated centers only)

Customer Contacts	2,829,819
Direct Calls Handled	1,478
Voicemail Calls Handled	868
Chats Handled	1,593
Customer Requests for Travel Packet	29,904
Welcome Centers Visitors	2,348,403

Affiliate Welcome Centers

Visitors	447,573
----------	---------

Community Partner/Brochure Program Summary

Number of MOA Brochure Program Participants	51
Number of MSP Airport Brochure Program Participants	39
Print Materials Distributed	630,800

WORKING WITH TALENTED AND DIVERSE STORYTELLERS

As we aim to elevate Minnesota's diversity, we know we must work with diverse members of our community and travel aficionados to help tell those stories. In FY23 we worked with...

WRITERS



Mecca Bos



Ashlea Halpern



Kathryn Koranda



Louis Livingston-Garcia



Dustin Nelson



Amy Rea



Erica Wacker

CONTENT CREATORS




Wheelchair travel expert
Cory Lee
[@curbfreecorylee](#)



Thrifty with a Compass,
best friend travel bloggers
Wunmi Alowonle and
Sophia Tran
[@thriftywithacompass](#)



Outdoor & adventure travelers
Justine & Sam Goldon
[@wanderfulwives](#)

A photograph of two cyclists riding away on a paved path through a dense forest. The path is flanked by rocky embankments. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a bright, hazy atmosphere. The cyclists are in the center of the frame, riding towards the light at the end of the path. The text 'MAXIMIZING PARTNER AND STAKEHOLDER LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the lower left side of the image.

**MAXIMIZING
PARTNER AND
STAKEHOLDER
LEADERSHIP AND
COLLABORATION**

FY2023 MARKETING GRANT PROGRAMS: \$1.5 MILLION

ROUND 1

Dates: 1/1/2022 – 12/31/2022

Awarded \$1M to 104 grantees

Max award: \$15k

1:1 cash match requirement

No geographical limitations or in/out-state requirement

ROUND 2

Dates: 1/3/2023 – 6/30/2023

Awarded \$500k to 58 grantees

Max award: \$20k

1:1 cash match requirement

Prioritization for accessibility improvements, group business and out of state marketing

INDUSTRY OUTREACH

In FY23, we were back on the road to listen to and learn from stakeholders all over Minnesota. With more than 100 presentations and agency updates to key stakeholder groups statewide, we made connecting to communities a top priority. We also reignited our “Agency Destination Update Series” where staff could learn what’s happening around the state from more than 15 community partners. We continued to update travelers and stakeholders alike through increased communications, hundreds of in-person and digital meetings, and our tried-and-true weekly industry email, EMT Express.

We continue to expand our outreach efforts through increasing our staff presence at industry meetings as well as supporting staff subject matter presentations to support our growing community.

INDUSTRY NEWS & RESOURCES

EMT Express is Explore Minnesota’s weekly newsletter for Minnesota travel industry professionals with more than 7,200 industry subscribers. In 2022 we launched a new template design to EMT Express to match Explore Minnesota’s overall branding, adding three calls to action for the industry for quick access to adding an event, creating a listing, and telling us what’s new around the state.

We continue to update our industry website with resources stakeholders can use daily. We launched a more frequent Travel Indicators email and report that provides the most up to date information on key travel indicators, how Minnesota compares to the competition, Explore Minnesota activity, visitor trends, new research and more.

We also onboarded a new tourism data tool, Datafy, to give key insights into event traffic, traveler origin information, and county-level visitation trend reports. We are supercharging our research to ensure we can help you and the state efficiently and effectively spend our marketing dollars.

We surveyed the industry to learn more about what you value most in the research and data we provide, and you’ll start to see us change some of our efforts in FY24 to give you more of what you need.



#TOURISMMATTERS

In FY23, we officially launched the Tourism Matters industry microsite to give you everything you need to advocate for Minnesota tourism. To help get the word out about why #TourismMatters to Minnesota, we hired a Government Relations Coordinator and pulled together a legislative communication plan to keep our industry updated with action at the Capitol.

- [Tourism Matters Videos](#)
- [Minnesota Leisure & Hospitality Factsheet](#)
- [Tourism Matters Suitcase](#)
- [Legislatively Appropriated Grants](#)

As we continue to tell the story of tourism and its importance to Minnesota, we'll update tourismmatters.org with more relevant videos, statistics, media hits and newsletters so you can share why #TourismMatters with your legislators.



NATIONAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM WEEK (NTTW)

As Explore Minnesota advocates for the importance of travel in Minnesota and throughout the world we supported and uplifted NTTW with a Governor Walz-issued proclamation. National Tourism Day in Minnesota was declared May 10, 2023, and communities across the state participated with their own initiatives.

- [Governor Walz Proclamation](#)
- [EMT LinkedIn](#)
- [NTTW Promotional Video](#)
- [Visit Thief River Falls Instagram](#)
- [Meet Minneapolis Twitter](#)
- [City of Duluth Press Event](#)
- [Minneapolis Mayoral Proclamation](#)
- [Owatonna Honors Hospitality](#)
- [Hospitality Minnesota Facebook](#)



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS & MAJOR EVENTS

TWIN CITIES MARATHON

Email and marketing partnership including promotion of Minnesota tourism ideas and travel planning prior to marathon weekend to participants (9,000+) came from all 50 states with more than 20 countries represented. The partnership allowed Explore Minnesota to engage with all participants plus more than 300,000 spectators through on-site branding at the state capitol.

THE GREAT NORTHERN 2023 (JANUARY 22-FEBRUARY 5, 2023)

The Great Northern is a one-of-a-kind festival that celebrates our cold and creative winters in Minneapolis and Saint Paul through 10 days of diverse programming that invigorate mind and body. Explore Minnesota worked with the organizers to support the “Seitu Jones: Ice Fishing and Printing” event on January 22, 2023, at Silverwood Park and Wim Hof workshops on February 5, 2023.

2022 MINNESOTA GOVERNOR’S PHEASANT HUNTING OPENER

The 2022 Minnesota Governor’s Pheasant Hunting Opener (GPHO) was held in Worthington and Nobles County in Southwest Minnesota October 14-15, 2022.

Explore Minnesota partnered with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the city of Worthington and Nobles County to promote the intersection of tourism, outdoor recreation, and hunting/hunting-related activities to the general public and to build and strengthen short-term and long-term relationships with communities, stakeholders, and elected leaders.

Our media reach for the GPHO was huge, with a radio audience reach of 768,925, online/print audience reach of 31,585,193 and social media reach of 437,424.

2022 GOVERNOR’S DEER HUNTING OPENER

In collaboration with the DNR, the 2022 Governor’s Deer Hunting Opener was held at the Elm Creek Park Reserve, Three Rivers Park District, Maple Grove, MN on Saturday, November 5, 2022.

With support from the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) Explore Minnesota and the DNR held a Hunters’ Reception and listening session on November 3 and a special shotgun hunt with Governor Tim Walz on Saturday, November 5, in the park reserve.



2023 MINNESOTA GOVERNOR’S FISHING OPENER

In collaboration with Visit Mankato and Greater Mankato Growth as well as the DNR, Explore Minnesota helped host the 75th Governor’s Fishing Opener. The weekend was packed with activities throughout Mankato, North Mankato and St. Peter, all culminating in fishing and shore lunch at Madison Lake.

By the Numbers

Media outlet participation	20+
Total print, online and broadcast media stories and mentions	1,000+
Estimated media audience reach	500+ Million
Social media platform impressions	1.2 Million
Influencer social media impressions	823k
Influencer engagements	35k
Influencer social media audience reach	844k



EXPLORE MINNESOTA TOURISM CONFERENCE

The 2023 Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference continued to be as accessible and affordable educational opportunity for Minnesota's tourism and hospitality industry. It was delivered as a hybrid event on Wednesday, March 1, at the Doubletree Hotel in Bloomington, MN with in-person attendance of 350 and an online broadcast to an additional 200 attendees. We are thankful for the generous support of our 23 local and national sponsors which helped to make this event possible.

Highlights included keynotes that addressed the fundamentals of diversity, equity and inclusion, improv comedy to apply to everyday life and world-renowned and native Minnesotan legendary polar explorer Ann Bancroft.

The Tourism Conference also includes the annual Explore Minnesota Tourism Awards which celebrate the outstanding people, marketing and initiatives that help make Minnesota a premier travel destination. Dozens of submissions from the industry were received and scored with seven overall awards presented, including an Emerging Leader and Tourism Professional of the Year award.

New in 2023, Explore Minnesota created the opportunity for students and Indigenous community members to attend the Tourism Conference. Thirteen scholarships were awarded. Each scholarship recipient was matched with a mentor from the Minnesota tourism industry, including members of the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council.

A person wearing a bright yellow jacket and dark pants is paddleboarding on a calm river. The water is still, reflecting the surrounding autumn foliage and a bridge in the distance. The trees on the left bank are in full autumn color, with shades of yellow, orange, and green. The bridge in the background has several dark wooden pillars. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

**FOSTER
DESTINATION
STEWARDSHIP,
ENSURE
ORGANIZATIONAL
EXCELLENCE**

FOSTER DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

In FY23 we set out to explore a new goal—Foster Destination Stewardship. Destination stewardship represents a wide range of programs and projects, many of which are not yet underway. At its core, destination stewardship brings to light programs that support the sustainable development of Minnesota's destinations. Whether that means to protect our natural resources and encourage visitors to leave the outdoors as they found them, or working directly with DMOs across the state who want to grow their tourism offerings, ensuring adequate resources and support for their residents, destination stewardship allows us to responsibly grow Minnesota tourism.

On September 12, 2022, Explore Minnesota Executive Director Lauren Bennett McGinty joined Commissioners Sarah Strommen (DNR) and Steve Grove (formerly, DEED), and Duluth Mayor Emily Larson on an outdoor recreation tour around Duluth. The team held a listening session early in the day with key members of the area's outdoor recreation community, visited Loll Designs and Frost River for tours of their facilities, and finished the day with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new fishing pier at Indian Point Campground. The tour helped highlight how important outdoor recreation is to Minnesota's economy and communities and helped establish the government collaboration for the Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership.



THE OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP

In early 2023, Explore Minnesota joined forces with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRR) to develop the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership (ORIP). The goal of the joint effort is to further develop, promote, and enhance Minnesota's outdoor recreation opportunities, and Minnesota's outdoor recreation industries and economy through increasing access to the outdoors for all Minnesotans and visitors; promote conservation and stewardship; provide education and training; support economic development to leverage the outdoor recreation economy; and develop shared narratives of welcoming all to experience Minnesota's great outdoors.

CONTINUING OUR STEWARDSHIP JOURNEY

In FY24, Explore Minnesota plans to focus more on this initiative, including conducting a destination assessment and developing stewardship education opportunities for the tourism industry. With the addition of Explore Minnesota for Business to the Explore Minnesota portfolio, we continue to see opportunities to discuss the intersection of economic development and tourism. Destination stewardship is an ongoing journey for Explore Minnesota, and we anticipate new programs to support our destinations in the coming year.



ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Ensuring organizational excellence is about more than just quality work results. Explore Minnesota staff, scattered throughout the state, are some of the most passionate cheerleaders for the state of Minnesota. To ensure organizational excellence, Explore Minnesota must provide a working environment where employees can thrive, learn and grow together. We continue to evolve our training opportunities, employee engagement programs and organization to better fit the needs of Explore Minnesota now and prepare us to innovate for the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN FY23:

- To continue to grow staff engagement, the Employee Engagement Committee re-established goals and objectives for the coming year and created a slate of engagement activities from lunch-and-learns to themed potlucks to ensure employees felt part of a team.
- Explore Minnesota welcomed more than 10 new employees in a variety of positions across the state. Of those positions, seven positions were either brand new or reimagined to better fit the needs of the organization. For the first time, Explore Minnesota welcomed a Government Relations Coordinator, HR Director, Project Coordinator, Contract Coordinator, two Deputy Directors and a refreshed Communications/Media Relations Manager to the staff.
- With the introduction of the two new deputy positions, we reconfigured our departments to better align with our goals. The Destination Marketing team works to produce seasonal and annual marketing campaigns, coordinates communications (both internally and externally), manages and sets strategy for the website and social media, and helps Minnesota earn valuable media. The Destination Development team focuses on industry relations and communications, international market development and PR, and Welcome Centers. As the organization grows to include new departments like Explore Minnesota for Business and Outdoor Recreation, we are primed to better communicate and collaborate under the new structure.
- We continued quarterly meetings where all staff come from around the state to experience an in-depth look at a destination attraction and learn from colleagues about what's coming up next. To date, we have held six quarterly meetings at places like, the Minnesota Zoo, the Mall of America, Mill City Museum, and the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Each training day gives staff a chance to network and connect with colleagues, learn more about iconic destinations to better share the stories with our visitors, and the business of Explore Minnesota.



Explore Minnesota
121 7th Place East, Suite 360
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101, USA

exploreminnesota.com/industry