

# SOUTH DAKOTA TOURISM

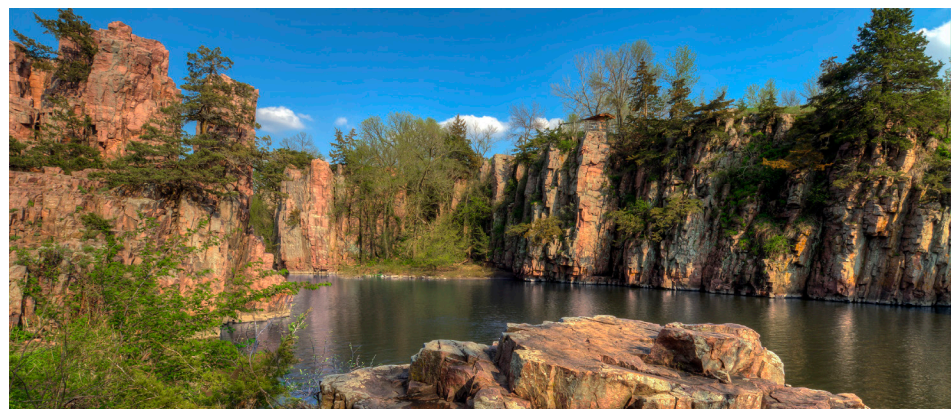
2022-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

*South Dakota*

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Learn more at [SDVisit.com](https://SDVisit.com)





## ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

The South Dakota Department of Tourism's mission is to enhance the quality of life for all South Dakotans by strengthening our communities and their tourism economies, encouraging responsible stewardship of our destination, and creating meaningful experiences for all to enjoy.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is made up of two divisions: Tourism and the South Dakota Arts Council. Tourism is separated into four teams: Global Media & Public Relations, Global Travel & Trade, Global Marketing & Brand Strategy, and Industry Outreach, Development & Research. Together, we're here to serve the people of South Dakota and all who come to meet our Great Faces and explore our Great Places.





## LEADING THE WAY FOR SOUTH DAKOTA TOURISM

Hello Industry Friends!

On behalf of our entire Department of Tourism team, I am pleased to share our 2022–2025 strategic plan.

What a journey it's been!

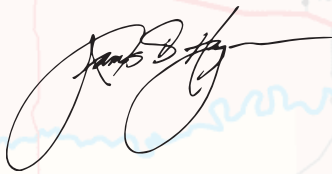
In the summer of 2021, as we envisioned this project and what a successful outcome would look like, we strived to achieve two things. First, we were committed to creating a plan that would incorporate the many voices of our industry from every region of our state. Second, it was important that we thoughtfully build upon the powerful momentum South Dakota tourism has experienced in recent years.

I believe we have done just that.

We are grateful to the nearly 200 stakeholders who participated in our statewide survey and to those who contributed their valuable time and energy at our planning retreat in Pierre. Because of their thoughtful guidance and passion for South Dakota, we were able to create a strategic plan that simultaneously addresses the most important needs of today and plants essential visionary seeds for tomorrow.

In this plan, you will read about big goals. You will also read about bold actions that will require new kinds of partnerships and collaborations. None of them will be easy to achieve, but all of them will be necessary to ensure South Dakota remains one of America's most coveted destinations for generations to come, while also continuing to offer the unique quality of life that can only be found in this great state.

We look forward to partnering with you to realize the many ambitions this plan includes and to leading the way for South Dakota tourism.



James D. Hagen  
Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Tourism







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# Introduction





## STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT THAN EVER

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruption and uncertainty to the global economy. In particular, the travel and tourism industry was among the hardest hit, having experienced steep declines across a range of key performance indicators, including, but not limited to, air travel, meetings and conferences, occupancy rates and tax revenues.

Through it all, South Dakota's tourism industry showed its focus and resilience, having experienced overall positive gains in economic impact. Industry performance remained strong, further reinforcing the value of tourism and the important role it plays as a driver of our state's growing economy. In fact, South Dakota led the nation in travel and tourism recovery. According to Tourism Economics and the U.S. Travel Association, by May 2021, South Dakota's tourism economy was the very first in the nation to fully recover from any negative impacts of the global pandemic.

*2021 Economic Impact of Tourism for South Dakota: Study conducted by Tourism Economics*



**13.5 million**

Total number of visitors



**54,208**

Total jobs supported by tourism



**\$4.4 billion**

Total visitor spending



**\$1.8 billion**

Household income generated by tourism supported jobs



**\$2.9 billion**

Contributed to state GDP



**\$980**

Tax savings to each household because of tourism activity

## AN INDUSTRY-INFORMED STRATEGIC PLAN

The creation of our new strategic plan began in July of 2021 with the launch of a comprehensive industry survey that helped us understand the challenges our partners were experiencing and the strategic priorities they felt were most important over the next three years.

Once the survey process was complete, we then held a facilitated strategy retreat in Pierre where we could dive deeper into the various insights we received from the survey process. Participants included nearly 70 industry stakeholders from all four of South Dakota's tourism regions, with leaders representing core facets of our tourism economy, including lodging & hospitality, food & beverage, attractions, destination organizations, and industry association partners.









Following the survey and retreat efforts, we convened an internal Department of Tourism planning team to begin creating our three-year strategic plan. The team gathered for a series of planning sessions over the course of four months (September through December of 2021).

The result of this work is a three-year, industry-informed strategic plan. The Department of Tourism will use this plan to focus its efforts and continue the positive momentum our industry is experiencing.



## HOW THE PLAN IS ORGANIZED

The plan follows a straightforward framework that includes the following planning elements:

Planning Element	Definition
 <b>Vision</b>	The ideal future state we envision for South Dakota as a destination
 <b>Mission</b>	The core purpose of our work
 <b>Values</b>	The fundamental beliefs that shape how we work together as a team and serve our partners statewide
 <b>Culture</b>	How we view ourselves and our workplace
 <b>Reputation</b>	The experience we create for our partners and stakeholders
 <b>Strategic Imperatives</b>	The primary areas of work that will shape our strategic direction
 <b>Performance Measures</b>	How we will track and report on the progress of our strategic plan
 <b>Strategic Initiatives</b>	The big bodies of work we will take on

The department will implement the plan with a spirit of flexibility and a commitment to making needed adjustments to ensure the greatest positive impact for our industry partners statewide.



## OUR VISION

With a spirit of freedom and optimism, South Dakota's Great Faces and Great Places inspire and unite all visitors and residents through the transformational power of travel.

## OUR MISSION

We enhance the quality of life for all South Dakotans by strengthening our communities and their tourism economies, encouraging responsible stewardship of our destination, and creating meaningful experiences for all to enjoy.

## OUR VALUES

- Be kind, respectful, and understanding.
- Be creative, passionate, and open to ideas.
- Be positive and carry a can-do attitude.
- Be collaborative and communicative.
- Be bold and fearless.

## OUR CULTURE

We are proud South Dakotans who share a passion for our state, its people, and our beautiful places. Our team strives for excellence in creative marketing, innovative thinking, and attentive service to our industry. We take pride in our can-do attitude and aspire to be a leader among state tourism departments nationwide.

## OUR REPUTATION

As always, all team members within the department are committed to delivering the highest quality service to our industry partners across our state. Through our work and our interactions, we take our role seriously and strive to create a great experience for all those with whom we work.



We are committed to being

**VISIONARY and COLLABORATIVE  
LEADERS who are INNOVATIVE, BOLD,  
HARDWORKING, FRIENDLY, and HELPFUL.**



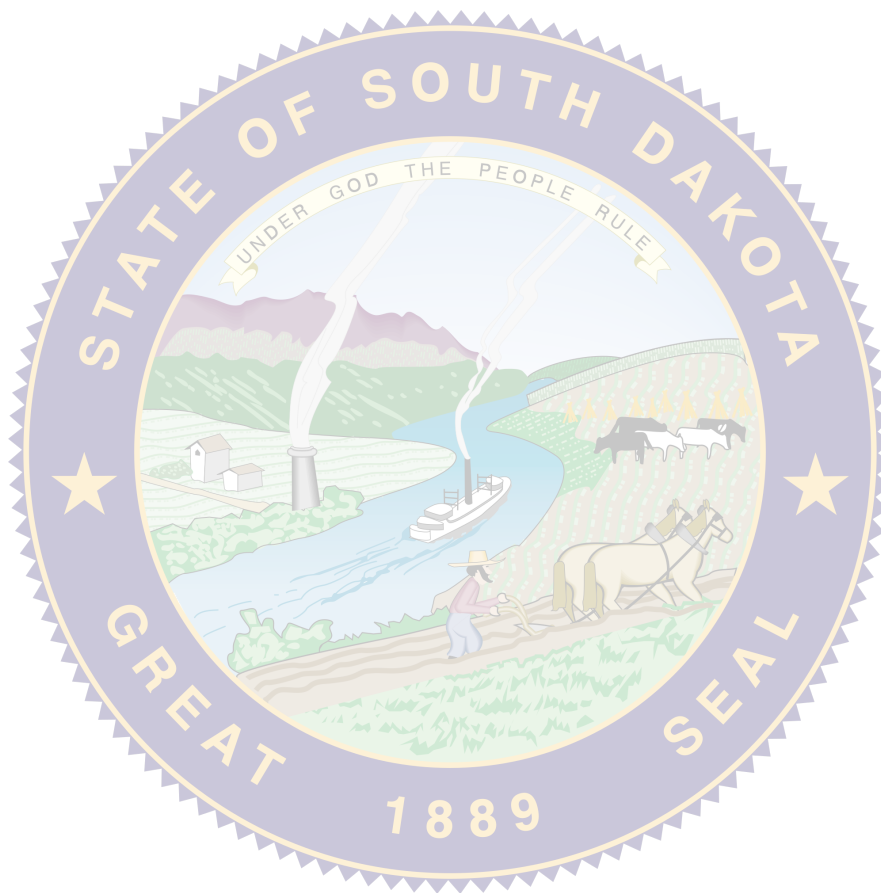
# Leading the Way for South Dakota Tourism: Our Strategic Path Forward





Our 2022–2025 Strategic Plan provides a focused roadmap for the department as we work toward the most positive and impactful results for our industry partners throughout South Dakota. Our close listening and robust outreach work early in the planning process, led us to identify four strategic imperatives. These will focus our efforts over the next three years:

- 1 Expand and Enhance the South Dakota Brand**
- 2 Advance the Development of Our Destination**
- 3 Advocate for Responsible Destination Management**
- 4 Prioritize Organizational Excellence**



**“South Dakota’s tourism industry stayed open for business and open for visitors, breaking records and helping contribute to our state’s record tax revenues. Our new strategic plan must be rock solid to build on this success, continue to strengthen the industry, and push the Department of Tourism to keep innovating and leading the industry into the future.”**

- Governor Kristi Noem



# Expand and Enhance the South Dakota Brand





Taking a long-term perspective on expanding our solid reputation as a top U.S. vacation destination will allow us to continue growing our visitor economy. Over the next three years, we will work to enhance and further strengthen our competitive position by expanding into new markets and attracting even more diverse visitors.



## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increase promotion tax
- Increase domestic market share
- Increase the diversity of our visitors
- Increase total visitation
- Increase total visitor spend



## INITIATIVES

**Research and expand into new growth markets.** South Dakota is widely known as an ideal destination for outdoor adventurers, with national and state parks being its top attractions. While South Dakota's diverse landscapes, great outdoors, national parks and monuments and family attractions, will always be at the core of its identity, expanding into new growth markets will diversify South Dakota's unique set of visitor experiences. It will also help to promote the lesser-known activities the state has to offer. Identifying new and unique product will attract travelers who might not have otherwise considered South Dakota when planning their vacations. This initiative will help us tap into new demographics and bring greater balance to the perception of South Dakota as a vacation destination.

**Expand marketing strategies to include more diverse populations.** South Dakota's off-the-beaten-path and rural destinations can provide a sense of adventure without the potential implications of congregating in large crowds. South Dakota offers an array of experiences for many types of travelers with different interests: family travel, active travel, secluded & romantic getaways, farm-to-table culinary exploration and culture & heritage. By expanding our marketing strategies to attract a more diverse audience, the department can raise awareness of South Dakota's hidden gems among a growing travel population and further strengthen South Dakota's reputation as a must-experience destination.

**Develop growth strategy for co-op programs.** The department continues to provide a variety of marketing programs to our industry stakeholders that ultimately support local efforts to attract visitors and drive local economic impact. As new marketing best practices emerge, and new opportunities develop, we will work to evolve how we support our partners with an emphasis on expanding and optimizing the mix of co-op programs we offer.





# Advance the Development of Our Destination





While infrastructure and development fall outside of the immediate purview of the department, we will continue to create connections with, and ensure collaboration between, other state agencies and private sector partners to support the stewardship and advancement of South Dakota's assets, attractions, and natural resources.



## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Bi-annual meetings with appropriate sister state agencies and entities to discuss and develop the travel and tourism workforce pipeline
- Create one Tourism Development Studio by the end of year three
- Research the feasibility of creating a new fund for marketing and development grants
- Conduct bi-annual meetings with local, state, and federal organizations



## INITIATIVES

### **Develop the travel and tourism workforce pipeline.**

Taking steps to ensure a robust and stable workforce pipeline is fundamental to a vibrant tourism economy. Like the rest of the country, South Dakota has experienced significant labor shortage challenges, particularly in the travel and tourism sector. Through this initiative, the department will collaborate with other entities to develop strategies to create and tap into a skilled statewide talent pipeline and positively position tourism and hospitality as a good career choice.

### **Lay the groundwork for a tourism development studio and seek out collaborative resources and partnerships that can assist us in that development.**

The department is always looking for collaborative ways to support and bring value to our communities. This initiative seeks to establish and implement a tourism development program that helps communities across our state increase and sustain desired visitor activity as well as more resilient and sustainable tourism economies. Through our Tourism Development Studio, we will create an environment of innovation and action, helping our destination partners envision their desired futures, develop and implement effective strategies, and access the resources they need to maximize the full potential of their tourism assets.

### **Explore creating a new fund for marketing and development grants.**

As always, addressing South Dakota's opportunity to increase awareness among visitors of all that our state has to offer is a key goal for the department. A strong, multi-faceted marketing funding program will provide more resources to our local and regional partners whose efforts will attract visitors to their communities and regions. We will take steps to create new funding sources to support our partners' efforts to enhance their existing tourism product or create new product, and increase desired visitation.

### **Establish a stronger partnership with the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) to put greater emphasis on the development of the tourism industry.**

A stronger partnership with GOED will establish a joint initiative to strengthen marketing efforts, grow the hospitality workforce, further develop necessary connectivity and infrastructure, and expand the state's tourism product portfolio. The department and GOED can work together to create new experiences for visitors unique to South Dakota and increase the positive influence of tourism as a driver of the state's economy.

### **Assess and explore strategic ways the department can support our four tourism regions' branding and marketing.**

Each of the four tourism regions of South Dakota offers its own appeal, attracting travelers with a variety of interests, including abundant natural beauty, indigenous culture, renowned monuments, national parks, rivers, lakes, prairies, and more. By working closely with our regional partners, we can help them to develop innovative ways to market their unique offerings and increase desired visitation.



**Strengthen strategic partnerships with local, state, and federal organizations on issues such as electric vehicle charging stations and trail development.** A collective effort to improve and modernize the state's infrastructure and sustainable travel solutions is key to sustaining a vibrant tourism economy for generations to come. By partnering with private and government organizations, we can implement statewide initiatives to preserve South Dakota's most vulnerable locations and ensure a better future for our residents and visitors.

**Create niche marketing opportunities for the Arts.** South Dakota's reputation as a visitor destination is currently associated with rural living, outdoor activities, arts & culture, and family-oriented getaways. Identifying unique experiences for travelers interested in the Arts would offer new visitor opportunities. We will explore areas to engage with a wider audience using our marketing tools as well as focus on local travelers from other parts of the state who have an interest in art, museums, theatre, or other related experiences.









# Advocate for Responsible Destination Management





As we celebrate the many successes of South Dakota's tourism industry, we are also reminded of the impacts visitors have on the health and sustainability of our trails, waterways, communities, and resident quality of life. Therefore, our strategic plan prioritizes the need to strike the right balance between the positive economic impacts of visitors to our communities and the correlated implications for responsible utilization and maintenance of our natural resources, sustainability of our community assets, and the preservation of our South Dakota way of life.



## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Balance visitation across geography and seasons
- Establish collaborative partnerships with key organizations to educate visitors on responsible use of the outdoors
- Increase Visitor Satisfaction score
- Establish baseline Resident Sentiment score



## INITIATIVES

**Promote distribution of visitors across geography and season.** To mitigate the effects of potential over-tourism in South Dakota's most popular destinations and distribute economic impact across communities, we see a need to create greater traction around the state's lesser-visited parks, historical locations, and cultural sites. This initiative recognizes the importance of continuing to build awareness of lesser-known visitor experiences statewide and proactively promoting South Dakota as a year-round destination.

**Create a focus on sustainable travel.** With South Dakota's strong emphasis on outdoor attractions and pursuits, we see an opportunity to prioritize responsible tourism and maintain a strong commitment to mitigating the negative effects tourism can have on the environment. However, sustainable tourism goes beyond just environmental responsibility; it also highlights social and economic responsibility by preserving cultural heritage and supporting local businesses. As South Dakota's tourism sector continues to grow, we will keep sustainability at the forefront of our marketing efforts and product portfolio while educating visitors on the importance of responsible travel practices.

### **Develop additional training opportunities for industry partners.**

Travel trends have shifted in recent years. New people have entered the industry, and the needs and wants of visitors are rapidly evolving. As a result, there is a clear need for industry-wide education and training to be responsive to the shifts we are seeing. Through this initiative, the department will work to understand current and ongoing professional development needs and ways we can provide resources and access to training that is responsive, specific, and valuable.

### **Assist the Visitor Industry Association (VIA) in evolving as an organization.**

We are committed to collaborating with the VIA as a key strategic partner in our joint efforts to ensure an environment in which South Dakota's tourism economy will continue to thrive for years to come. Strategic alignment of priorities and proactive coordination of efforts between our organizations will ensure efficient and effective use of statewide tourism industry resources and advance our shared interests.

### **Educate and engage residents on the importance of tourism to South Dakota.**

Putting the residents of South Dakota at the center of our work continues to be a priority for the department. The people of our state—those who live here, raise families here, own and operate businesses, and work in our communities—are key to what makes the South Dakota visitor experience so remarkable. As we continue taking steps to responsibly grow our tourism economy, this initiative will emphasize ways to consistently connect with our residents, listen to their perspectives and proactively share the positive contribution tourism makes to South Dakota's way of life.



# Prioritize Organizational Excellence





Our ability to successfully implement our strategic plan depends on the continued efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Tourism as an organization. As such, we will prioritize the ongoing development of our people, skills, insights, and resources that enable us to deliver consistent value and support to our industry partners and stakeholders across the state.



## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Work with a third-party organization to implement a cross-training plan/program
- 100% employee participation in two professional development trainings each year, as well as one leadership training
- Schedule two familiarization tours for staff; include a Tourism Cares element



## INITIATIVES

**Enable employee participation in professional development trainings.** We believe in the importance of individual learning and professional growth as a requisite for continually increasing the value we deliver to our partners and stakeholders statewide. To help our team members reach their full potential, we will provide access to development and skill-building opportunities that help them do their best work each day.

**Encourage employee participation in leadership training.** We believe leadership happens at every level of our organization, regardless of title or tenure. Leadership development promotes critical thinking, accountability, and better decision-making. It also helps deepen individual engagement and effectiveness. By actively encouraging employee participation in leadership development opportunities, the department will further strengthen its ability to attract and retain top talent and create an environment in which all team members are able to deepen their capabilities and impact.

**Foster stronger team cohesion and culture.** In all organizations, team cohesion and shared purpose leads to happier, more enthusiastic employees. It provides each employee with a clear understanding of how their individual goals play into the overall team goal and helps to ensure organizational success. As the department's workforce becomes more geographically distributed and a hybrid work environment becomes the norm, we will work to find new and effective ways to further strengthen team cohesion and a high-performing culture.

**Identify process improvements (for our internal communications, and our work remote policy).** Efficient internal processes and communications—especially given the increasingly remote nature of how we work together—are critical components to our effectiveness across all parts of our organization. Through this initiative, we will identify and prioritize areas of improvement and implement specific actions that help to continue delivering the highest standard of service to our partners and stakeholders.

**Increase the Department's engagement with the Bureau of Human Resources.** The Bureau of Human Resources is an important partner to the department, helping us to better understand and be more responsive to the needs of our team members. We will identify ways in which we can more frequently tap into BHR's many resources and programs aimed at supporting our efforts to continually improve upon our performance.



The Department of Tourism team, all of whom contributed to this important project, is excited about the future of South Dakota tourism and to supporting our many stakeholders across our great state.

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