



# IOWA TOURISM OFFICE

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

travel  
**IOWA**®

*The Iowa Tourism Office, which exists within the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), is the official voice of the state's tourism industry. The office works collaboratively with Iowa's destinations and attractions to increase visitation, enhance economic impact of travel and market Iowa to travelers.*

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM

In Calendar Year 2022, tourism was responsible for \$6.9 billion in direct visitor spending in Iowa and a \$10.4 billion total economic impact. This visitor spending means that approximately \$19 million was spent every day by visitors to Iowa in 2022. More than 68,000 Iowans are employed by the tourism industry and tourism spending generates a total of \$1.1 billion in state and local taxes.



**\$494 MILLION**  
LOCAL TAX REVENUES



**\$572 MILLION**  
STATE TAX REVENUE

Source: *Tourism Economic Impact Report, 2022*

## MARKETING CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

The Legislature appropriated \$1.1 million to the IEDA in fiscal year 2023 for marketing, advertising and strategic planning implemented by the Iowa Tourism Office. In addition, the Iowa legislature appropriates funds from gaming, alcoholic beverage sales and the general fund to IEDA annually and IEDA received a grant through the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) to support tourism marketing, advertising and strategic planning.

When people from other states see Iowa on TV or online, they want to visit. When they visit, they are more likely to stay. This is why IEDA's visitor and talent attraction strategies fit hand in glove through its This is Iowa initiative. IEDA's marketing is helping Iowa address one of its major challenges: population. The state must attract more people – visitors and residents – from other states.

This is Iowa was built on a significant research study, with two key findings:

1. Most people simply don't know enough about the state to form an accurate opinion.
2. Tourism is critical: two-thirds of U.S. adults say they have seriously considered moving to a place they have visited.

## TARGET AUDIENCES

Our campaign messaging, audience and tactics are all based on research and measured for greatest impact. Based on the research, the consumer target audience has been divided into three sub-segments, recognizing that those at different life stages have different motivators and access information differently.

**Location:** Adults living in Midwest states and nationally.



### YOUNG ADULTS

looking to start and/or grow their career and to experience new things.



### YOUNG FAMILIES

wanting to make memories and find work/life balance.



### MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS

who have disposable income and may recommend Iowa to younger generations

## MESSAGING

Our research found that providing facts about Iowa's tourism attractions and business-friendly attributes increased favorability toward Iowa and interest in visiting and considering Iowa as a place to live. Messages are focused around the topics best received in the research:

- Natural beauty and outdoor recreation
- Culture and lifestyle, from art to festivals, breweries and restaurants
- Affordability of travel
- Economic vitality of communities

## SOUL OF IOWA CAMPAIGN

IEDA's Soul of Iowa campaign was launched in April 2022 with fully integrated marketing tactics to showcase drone "fly throughs" of four of Iowa's hidden gems – the Arnolds Park Amusement Park, downtown Decorah, Des Moines' Lauridsen Skatepark and the Indianola National Balloon Classic event. The campaign extended into FY23.

We are proud to share that the Soul of Iowa campaign was:

- Winner of a national Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Silver Anvil award.
- Winner of the Fall 2022 Bend the World contest, recognized as one of the most creative campaigns of the year at FleishmanHillard, a global public relations and marketing firm that provides research, marketing and other services to IEDA.
- A finalist for US Travel's Mercury Awards for Best Video Campaign.

*"I don't just want to visit Iowa, I need to visit Iowa after seeing this project. It's that well done!"*

*"So great to flip the 'flyover' term on its head."*

From March through July 2023, the Soul of Iowa campaign was refreshed and continued to be the main feature of Travel Iowa marketing. The campaign garnered:



**60.5 MILLION  
PAID MEDIA  
IMPRESSIONS**



**13.9 MILLION  
VIDEO PLAYS**



**36.3 MILLION  
SOCIAL MEDIA  
IMPRESSIONS**



**451,000  
WEBSITE VISITS**



## UPCOMING PLANS

With the success of the Soul of Iowa campaign, planning for a full extension of the messaging campaign began in early 2023.

Funded by a federal EDA grant of \$5.2 million, more than 40 additional communities, attractions, parks and tourist spots will be featured in the Soul of Iowa 2.0 campaign. Asset capture and creation took place throughout the summer and fall of 2023, with a full campaign launch planned for early Calendar Year 2024.

Communities that will be featured as part of the Soul of Iowa 2.0 extended campaign include:

- Amana Colonies
- Ames
- Audubon
- Boone
- Calmar
- Cedar Falls
- Cedar Rapids
- Charles City
- Council Bluffs
- Dubuque
- Dyersville
- Fairfield
- Fayette County
- Fort Dodge
- Fort Madison
- Harpers Ferry
- Iowa City
- Keokuk
- Knoxville
- Lansing
- LeClaire
- LeMars
- Maquoketa
- Marshalltown
- Mason City
- McGregor
- Muscatine
- O’Brien County
- Oskaloosa
- Ottumwa
- Pella
- Quad Cities
- Sabula
- Sioux City
- Storm Lake
- Templeton
- Villages of Van Buren
- Winterset

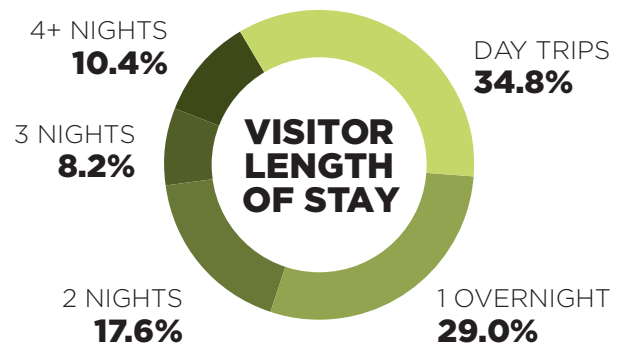
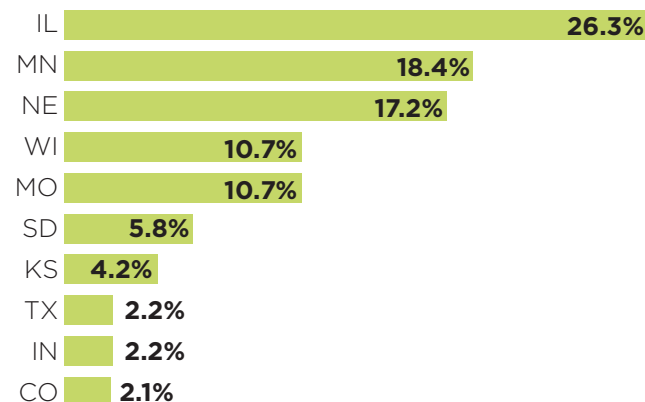
These communities join Decorah, Des Moines, Indianola and Okoboji as part of the holistic Soul of Iowa campaign, showcasing Iowa from a new perspective and targeting potential visitors.

## VISITATION RESULTS

In FY23, an estimated 44.1 million visitors visited or traveled within Iowa, a growth of 8.6 percent, year over year.

Of Iowa’s out-of-state visitation, the top states include Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Missouri.

### TRIP VOLUME BY TOP ORIGIN STATES



When visitors come from out of state to Iowa, 65.2% of them stay at least one night in the state.

SOURCE: Arrivalist, FY23 Visitation Dashboard

# IOWA TOURISM INDUSTRY STRATEGIC PLAN



*We invite curious explorers to discover Iowa as an extraordinary adventure.*

In 2022, the Iowa Tourism Industry unveiled a five-year tourism strategic plan for the state. The strategic planning process resulted in the development of five imperatives for the tourism industry:

1. Unify the industry around a shared long-term vision
2. Amplify the awareness of Iowa's tourism brand
3. Ensure Iowa's tourism experience is welcoming to all
4. Ensure tourism readiness
5. Drive an increase in long-term tourism investments

Progress began on strategic plan imperatives in FY22 and continued into FY23. Several milestones and action steps were completed.

## **IMPERATIVE 1: UNIFY INDUSTRY AROUND A SHARED LONG-TERM VISION**

The strategic planning process identified a need to build collaboration among members of the tourism industry. The second year of strategic plan work saw many milestones met and projects completed under this imperative.



**22% GROWTH**  
INDUSTRY NEWSLETTER LIST



**5% INCREASE**  
NEWSLETTER OPEN RATE



**989 NEW LISTINGS**  
ADDED TO TRAVELIOWA.COM

**Milestone: Define and Create Comprehensive Database of Tourism Organizations and Share Database Access.**

A new customer relationship management (CRM) system was completed and launched in June 2023. The new system links the Travel Iowa website information with industry profiles, creating one website for people who are interested in Iowa to view updated tourism listings, traveler-facing information and order travel guides and maps in bulk. The CRM solves several challenges by creating a centralized database of tourism industry contacts with the ability to update in real-time.

Planned enhancements include the ability to access proprietary research via login and sharing access to the industry databases with other tourism organizations. This CRM system also allows the Iowa Tourism Office to track industry engagement, a key measurement of this imperative.

IMPERATIVES	OBJECTIVES	INITIATIVES
<p><b>Unify industry around shared long-term vision</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage 100% of local, regional and state tourism organizations (by 2025) to pledge support for Iowa tourism’s shared long-term vision and strategic plan goals.</li> <li>Engage 100% of all stakeholders in at least one statewide event, meeting and/or program annually by 2027.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop communications plan in support of strategic plan imperatives to align stakeholders and influence awareness, advocacy, and engagement.</li> <li>Establish and enable statewide industry networking, mentorship, collaboration infrastructure and resource-sharing framework.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Amplify awareness of Iowa’s tourism brand</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attain 5% growth in year-over-year visitor spending through 2027.</li> <li>Achieve 65% of total visitation from out-of-state visitors by 2027.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate and develop statewide destination messaging and partner engagement campaign, toolkits and tactics.</li> <li>Continue to invest in and share relevant data and research to inform strategic insights and drive strategic campaign development, audience expansion and economic impact.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ensure Iowa’s tourism experience is welcoming to all</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve Iowa’s tourism reputation as “Welcoming to all” (Situation Assessment, Fig. 41), by raising score to an average of 4.0 by 2027.</li> <li>Commit 15% of resources provided (grants, marketing, etc.) to support tourism diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct diversity, equity &amp; inclusion market research to identify program needs, drive resource development and ensure resources and experiences are in alignment with DE&amp;I and accessibility best practices.</li> <li>Establish an incentive for grant programs to encourage alignment and partnership with DE&amp;I principles and improve accessibility for diverse communities.</li> <li>Develop improved partnership opportunities with Iowa’s Office of Human Rights, Iowa’s Civil Liberties Union and other representative organizations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ensure tourism readiness</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage 75% of all local destinations/ attractions in statewide tourism readiness assessments and training programs by 2027.</li> <li>Achieve year-over-year increase in visitor and resident sentiment scores based on 2022 baseline.</li> <li>Increase investment in readiness infrastructure (i.e. wayfinding, parking, safety, sustainability, etc.) based on 2022 baseline.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop resource toolkits that leverage best practices and templates for use by attractions, DMOs and industry professionals.</li> <li>Establish a framework for public/private partnerships, and incentive and grant programs to encourage investment in wayfinding, technology and infrastructure updates.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drive an increase in long-term tourism investments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generate a 5% increase year-over-year in tourism revenue and taxes generated through 2027.</li> <li>Drive an increase in public (local, regional, state) and private investments to support Iowa’s tourism marketing and development based on 2022 baseline.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore opportunities to align existing state resources (IEDA/IFA, DNR, DOT, IDALS, etc.) to tourism infrastructure needs that benefit both visitors and residents.</li> <li>Catalog tourism infrastructure needs and identify funding sources in collaboration with local/state/federal economic development organizations, natural resources agencies and private industry leadership.</li> <li>Explore growth-dependent funding options to increase resources available to support tourism.</li> </ul>

### **Milestone: Periodically Gather Information from the Tourism Industry to Understand and Address Needs and Track Engagement.**

The Iowa Tourism Office partnered with the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Institute for Decision Making to establish an annual “State of the Industry” survey in January 2023. This report can be viewed [here](#).

Top opportunities for improvement based on partner responses include:

- Promoting a wide variety of attractions and amenities, including agritourism, outdoor recreation and rural tourism opportunities.
- Supporting small businesses, local shops and privately-owned lodging properties.
- Improving infrastructure of convention centers and resorts to support tourism.
- Focusing on family-friendly activities and experiences that showcase Iowa’s culture and heritage.
- Encouraging more collaboration between communities and businesses to create travel packages.
- Improving public transportation, especially in rural areas.
- Improving wayfinding signage for cities and attractions.
- Providing sufficient funding and support for tourism.

This survey will be repeated annually to track progress and trends.

### **Milestone: Establish Regular Touchpoints from the Iowa Tourism Office**

In October 2022, the Iowa Tourism Office restructured existing resources to hire two full-time tourism liaisons to provide outreach and support statewide. The liaisons are tasked with providing outreach support to tourism partners and local organizations, acting as a vital conduit of information between the industry and IEDA and supporting additional strategic plan imperatives in the coming years.

In FY23, the two tourism liaisons:

- ***Met individually with 808 industry partners.***
- ***Presented and provided educational programming to approximately 1,500 people at group meetings and events.***
- Developed outreach plans for a range of tourism partners, including: Convention and Visitors Bureaus, chambers of commerce, city and county governments, economic development offices, attractions, art and culture organizations, museums, lodging, restaurants, retail, wineries and breweries, casinos, events, historical societies, Main Street communities, outdoor recreation groups, parks, trails, scenic byways and other nonprofits and service groups.
- Facilitated industry engagement and involvement in grant programs, conference and event planning and marketing tactics.

In addition to this outreach, the Iowa Tourism Office established a new Tourism Insider meeting series. These bimonthly meetings are held at different locations around the state and include an update from the Tourism Office, roundtable discussions, educational panels and tours and immersive experiences of the host community. In FY23, meetings held in LeClaire and Stuart hosted a total of 93 tourism partners. Additional meetings have been scheduled into FY24 in Pella, Mason City and Decorah. Additional meeting locations for FY25 will be announced soon.

***“I enjoyed getting to connect with some other professionals and learn about Iowa through many lenses.”***

***“I thought the entire event was useful, informative, and relevant to what I do to market our destination.”***



**Milestone: Create and Support an Industry and “Internal” Communications Plan.**

In FY23, the nonprofit Iowa Tourism Industry Partners (iTIP) organization expanded their industry mentorship program. The iTIP mentorship program matches newcomers in the industry (mentees) with seasoned industry veterans (mentors). By the end of the year-long program, mentees should feel confident navigating Iowa’s tourism landscape and have been introduced to valuable industry contacts. So far, the program has graduated 19 pairs of mentors/mentees.

Next steps in this milestone include establishing and convening a Tourism Advisory group to ensure industry voice and participation in a statewide tourism advocacy campaign.

*“The iTIP mentorship program illuminated the important work being done by our state’s tourism leaders and offered a window into the endeavors of my counterpart across the state. Now, I have another person in my network to collaborate, connect and strategize with under one united goal – bringing people to the great state of Iowa.”*

– Emma Schwaller  
Director of Marketing,  
Council Bluffs CVB

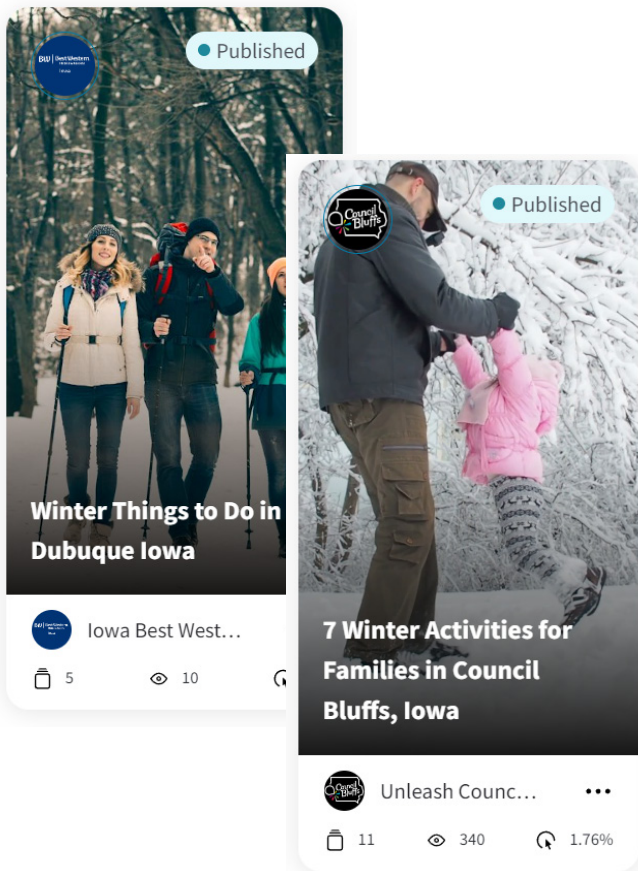
**IMPERATIVE 2: AMPLIFY AWARENESS OF IOWA’S TOURISM BRAND**

For the tourism industry to be successful and to continue to grow our economic impact, we must also amplify the awareness of Iowa as a destination through marketing.

**Milestone: Create a Branding and Marketing Resource Toolkit for the Industry.**

In FY23, the Iowa Tourism Office purchased a license for tourism entities to utilize a platform called Localhood, which gives all communities a way to easily be a part of statewide marketing campaigns. Localhood is provided at no cost to partners and allows them to create “stories” for use on social media and in search engine marketing. Stories are also incorporated into the Travel Iowa website. Stories are planned using a shared content calendar, allowing the Iowa Tourism Office to gather content statewide and use it in larger marketing promotions.

So far, 103 tourism partners have used Localhood, 550+ stories have been published and Iowa stories have garnered 2.7 million Google impressions.

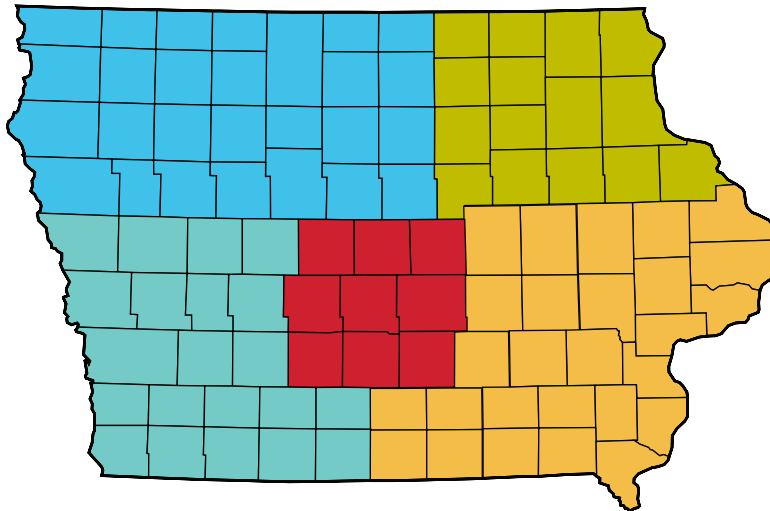


**Milestone: Create and Share a Destination Asset Inventory.**

The Iowa Tourism Office has secured the UNI Institute of Decision Making to assist with the development of an updated asset inventory. This project is planned to kick off in early 2024.

**Milestone: Utilize Newly Established Travel Areas to Encourage Collaboration in Marketing.**

Travel areas, established in FY22, were used widely for the first time in FY23 in the Spring/Summer 2023 Iowa Travel Guide. Content was developed and organized within the guide in these new travel areas.



**NORTHWEST IOWA**

Incorporates the area's prominent lakes and boating activities, prairie grasses and natural landscape, music notes depicting rich musical history of the area (Surf Ballroom, Iowa Rock & Roll Museum), all surrounded by a Frank Lloyd Wright-esque window background.



**CENTRAL IOWA**

Surrounding the state's capital city of Des Moines are incredible rural tourism attractions, like the High Trestle Trail, the Bridges of Madison County and Pella's Dutch architecture and tulips. The Capitol building dome provides a stately backdrop.



**NORTHEAST IOWA**

The state's unique topography and limestone cliffs are on full display in the Driftless Area. Freshwater springs are fodder for trout fishing and whitewater courses are abundant. The diamond background shape represents the iconic Field of Dreams



**SOUTHWEST IOWA**

This area features a sea of rolling hills, charming towns and historic landmarks, where visitors can bike, hike and play outdoors. The train engine background shape brings in the area's deep railroad history.



**SOUTHEAST IOWA**

Iowa's history, creativity and culture come alive in this area. Grant Wood called the area home, the banks of the Mississippi River are home to historic river towns and everything is outlined by an open book.

**Milestone: Develop a Visitor Profile.**

The Iowa Tourism Office has secured Future Partners, LLC, a travel and tourism-focused creative insights firm, to provide a full-scale visitor profile study, which will include quantitative and qualitative insights from visitors to Iowa, as well as people who have not visited Iowa. The visitor profile study will include demographic and psychographic information about who is - and is not - visiting Iowa, how much they spend when visiting, what activities they take part in, as well as other trip details. The visitor profile study will be completed in early 2024 and results will be made available to tourism partners at no cost.

**Milestone: Launch Data Assessment and Reporting Framework.**

The Iowa Tourism Office will create a dashboard of travel indicators that will be accessible via login to industry partners, and find and address any gaps in data.

Work on the last three Imperatives of the Iowa Tourism Industry Strategic Plan will begin in 2024.

