



## *The TuscaLIFE North Star*

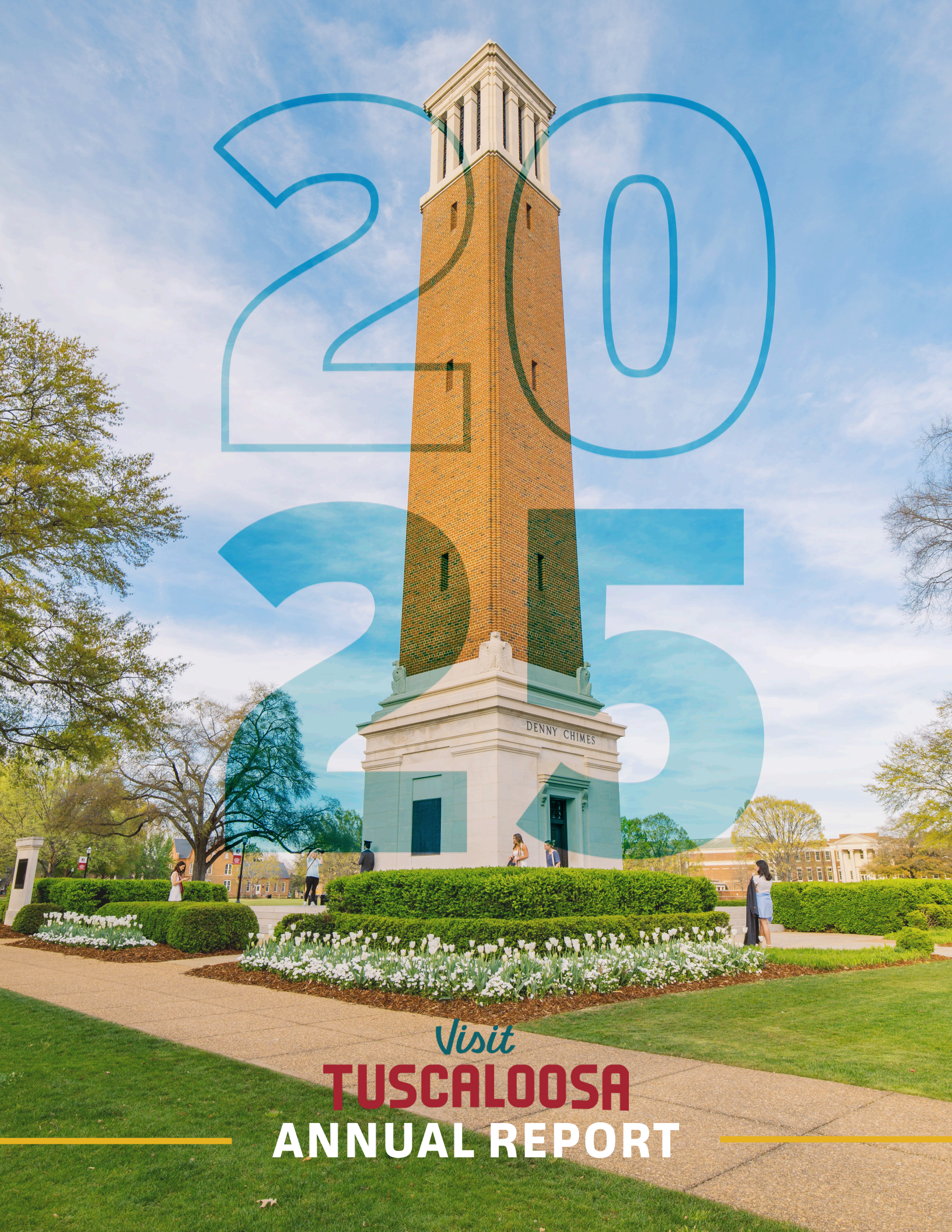
TuscaLIFE isn't just a visit; it's a way of experiencing Tuscaloosa in all its vibrance, depth, and charm. Here, life moves with a rhythm unique to this place — a blend of tradition and surprise, warmth and wonder. In TuscaLIFE, every encounter, every experience, feels like a chapter in a larger story, inviting you to step beyond the ordinary and embrace the energy, beauty, and spirit that make Tuscaloosa unforgettable.

From morning strolls along the river to the pulse of game day, Tuscaloosa captures more than just moments, it captures you. It's a community where each experience reveals another layer, leaving you with more than memories, but a feeling you'll carry long after you leave.

TuscaLIFE is a reminder that here, you don't just pass through; you become part of something bigger, where every visit feels like coming home to a place that has always been waiting for you.

**TUSCA**  
*Life*

*Visit*  
**TUSCALOOSA**



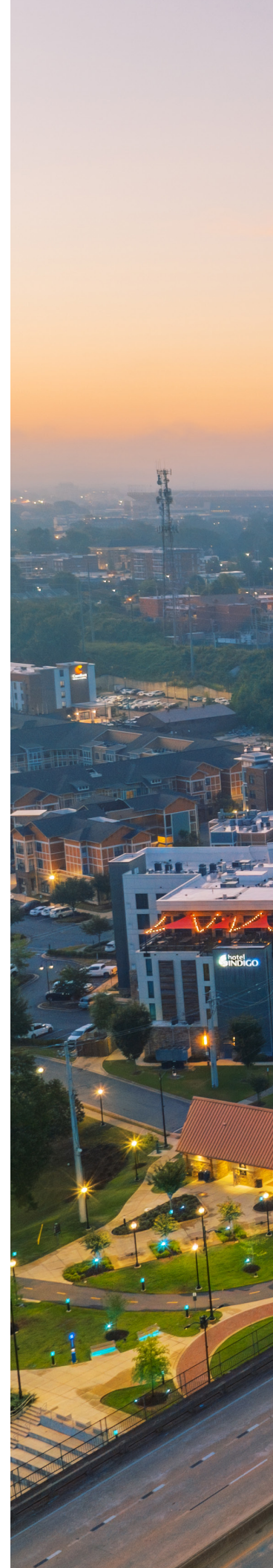
2025


DENNY CHIMES

*Visit*  
**TUSCALOOSA**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

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An aerial photograph of a city at dusk. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue. In the foreground, a multi-lane highway interchange is visible, with a prominent overpass structure supported by tall, illuminated pillars. The pillars are lit with blue and yellow lights. To the right, a modern building with a blue, illuminated facade is visible. In the background, various city buildings are lit up, and a large parking lot is filled with cars. The overall scene is a vibrant urban landscape at twilight.

*"Tourism is not a luxury. It is essential, absolutely necessary, and very important to the economic vitality and cultural vibrancy of our home."*

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR

# President

*"I believe in Tuscaloosa deeply - in its people, its potential, and the beautiful story we are still writing together."*



If there is one word that defined 2025 for Visit Tuscaloosa, it is momentum — and this was a year that asked us to earn it. As I welcomed my first child and stepped away for twelve weeks of maternity leave, I watched with immense pride as our team never missed a beat — continuing to pursue leads, develop partnerships, launch initiatives, and champion our community with the same passion and urgency that drives everything we do. That is not simply a reflection of a good team. It is a reflection of a great culture, and I am deeply grateful for each person who carries this mission forward every single day.

As I look back on 2025, I am filled with both gratitude and optimism. Gratitude for our funding partners, whose investment in Visit Tuscaloosa is returned to this community through every event we recruit, support, and assist — generating millions in economic impact, lodging tax revenue, and sales tax collections that fund the essential services our residents depend on. Tourism is not a luxury. It is essential, absolutely necessary, and very important to the economic vitality and cultural vibrancy of our home. I am also proud to have completed the Alabama Leadership Institute this year and to have been recognized among Business Alabama's Tuscaloosa County Movers & Shapers — honors I accept on behalf of the community and team that inspire me daily.

The momentum we built in 2025 is positioning us exceptionally well for the years ahead. Our sales team is fielding more leads than ever before, our marketing team launched a new brand, a new website, and earned national recognition — all while managing the day-to-day work of keeping Tuscaloosa top of mind for travelers near and far. And beyond our own efforts, we are energized by the investments being made across our community from River Run Park to pickleball facilities, and new culinary and cultural developments taking shape across the county. Visit Tuscaloosa is proud to have had a seat at some of those tables, serving as a champion for this growth that benefits all.

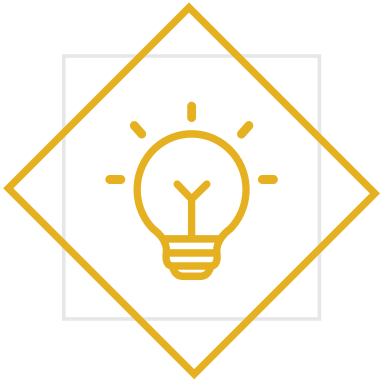
As I look ahead, my hope, excitement, and passion for this place only grows. I believe in Tuscaloosa deeply — in its people, its potential, and the beautiful story we are still writing together. I invite you to explore this report and see how your partnership is helping us build something lasting. Tuscaloosa's best years are still ahead, and we are honored to help lead the way.

**KELSEY RUSH**  
**PRESIDENT / CEO**



## OUR WHY

Proudly rooted in Tuscaloosa County, this fuels our passion to improve quality of life and share the spirit of our home with others.



## OUR VISION

Excel in illustrating the Tuscaloosa area as the South's premier college town, celebrated for its storied legacy and hospitality.



## OUR MISSION

To stimulate economic growth and foster resident pride through tourism and promotion efforts that inspire people to discover Tuscaloosa County.

## OUR CORE VALUES

- Our **family** comes first.
- Our **culture** fosters trust.
- Our **foundation** is built on collaboration.
- Our **efforts** embrace inclusivity.
- Our **service** always comes with a smile and solutions.
- Our **results** are legendary.

# VISIT TUSCALOOSA'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

1. Leverage highly focused opportunities for driving visitation.
2. Engage in destination product development planning.
3. Develop and promote the destination brand.
4. Measure, monitor, and celebrate tourism success to enhance the relevance of both tourism and Visit Tuscaloosa.
5. Increase the community's investment in destination promotion.



# Visitation Data

## 2025

### OVERALL 2025 VISITOR SPEND FOR TUSCALOOSA COUNTY



# \$1 BILLION

For every \$100 spent in Tuscaloosa County, **\$20 (or 20%)** was spent by a visitor. When you break this down into visitor spend towards local businesses, this dollar amount increases to **\$26 for every \$100**.

# 20%

**OF SPEND THAT  
CAME FROM VISITORS  
(+50 MILES)**



**2025 AVERAGE DAILY  
VISITOR SPEND**

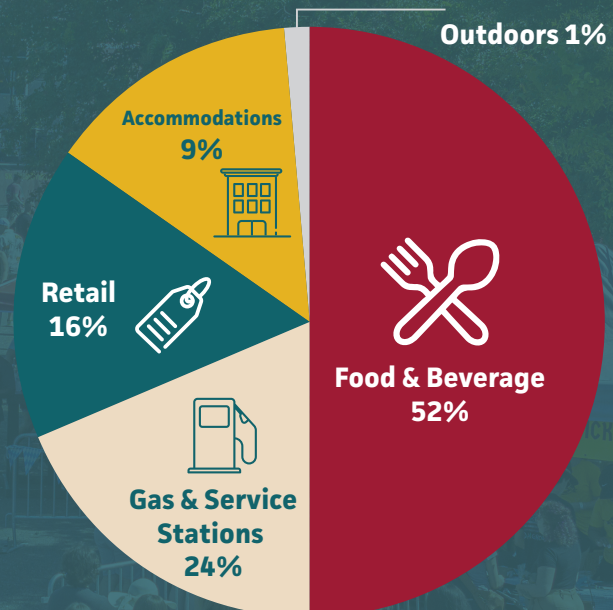
### % OF ALL DEVICES OBSERVED THAT WERE VISITORS

Of all devices observed in Tuscaloosa County in 2025, visitor and resident, **20%** were classified as a visitor.

That means **1 in 5 devices** observed was a visitor to our market.



## VISITOR SPEND BREAKDOWN BY TOP 5 CATEGORIES



# OVERALL VISITOR INSIGHTS

## OVERALL 2025 PAID ACCOMMODATION REVENUE



**\$136.2 MILLION**

**750K+**

### OVERNIGHT VISITORS

Travelers who take a trip outside of their usual routine and stay away from home for at least one night.

**32%**

vs.

**68%**

**IN-STATE VISITORS**

**OUT-OF-STATE VISITORS**

**1.1M**

### ROOM NIGHTS

Combined paid accommodation demand across Tuscaloosa County's hotel and short-term rental market in 2025.

## TOP 10 VISITOR MARKETS

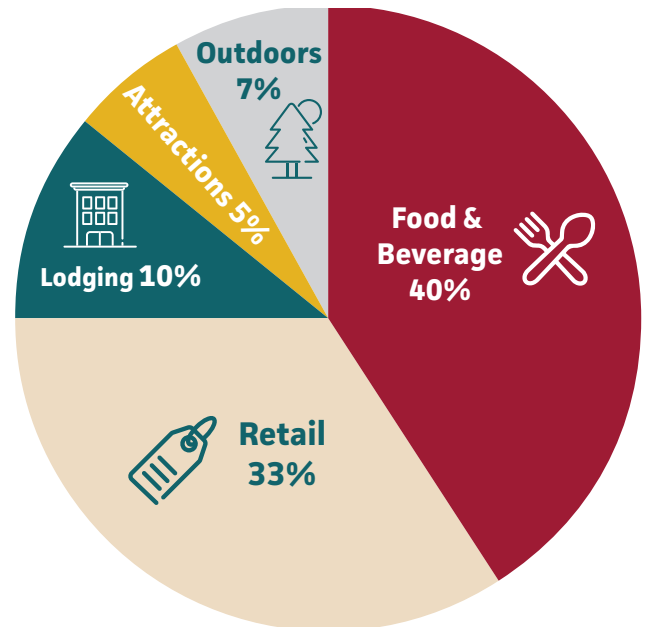
VISITOR MARKET AREA	% OF VISITORS	% OF VISITOR SPEND	DAILY AVG. VISITOR SPEND
Birmingham (Ann and Tusc) AL	12%	6%	\$39
Atlanta GA	8%	6%	\$36
Huntsville-Decatur (Florence) AL	7%	7%	\$48
Montgomery-Selma AL	6%	7%	\$41
Mobile - Pensacola - Ft. Walton	5%	6%	\$43
Columbus-Tupelo-West Point MS	4%	3%	\$46
New York, NY	3%	3%	\$38
Nashville, TN	3%	3%	\$38
Meridian, MS	2%	3%	\$53

**2.3K**

### VISITORS DIRECTLY ASSISTED

Through the visitor center (in person) or through online visitor guide requests.

## TOP 5 PLACES VISITORS VISITED



\*All data provided by CoStar, Zartico, AirDNA, and/or Symphony by Tourism Economics

# 2025 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## *Product Development Efforts*

### **1. BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE: TUSCALOOSA CIVIL RIGHTS DIGITAL PASS**

A Digital version of the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Trail launched, allowing residents and visitors to explore all 19 stops without paper brochures. The pass was later enhanced with powerful video content featuring Civil Rights Foot Soldier Maxie Thomas, whose firsthand accounts bring history to life at key stops including the Kress Building, Woolworth Sit-Ins, and First African Baptist Church.

### **2. A NEW WAY TO EXPERIENCE DOWNTOWN: HISTORIC WALKING TOURS**

In partnership with Historic Tuscaloosa, guided Historic Downtown Walking Tours were launched every Saturday in April. This 90-minute experience beginning and ending at the Jemison Mansion resulted in sold out tours that welcomed 125+ guests. Discussions are ongoing for growth of these tours.

### **3. PEDALING FORWARD EBIKE GRANT PROGRAM:**

Through an Innovate Alabama grant, Visit Tuscaloosa prepared to launch a six-bicycle rental program through local hotels, giving residents and visitors a new way to experience the scenic Riverwalk. The program fills a gap in our outdoor recreation offerings and we hope it inspires other local outfitters to explore similar opportunities for our community.

### **4. GROWING A TRADITION: RESTAURANT WEEK**

Now in its third year, Tuscaloosa Restaurant Week presented by Cadence Bank drew over 70 participating restaurants and generated significant dining activity during one of the slower seasons of the year. First-time participant Hoo's Q reported sales increased more than \$2,400 compared to the same week the prior year - a testament to the event's growing community and economic impact. We will look to explore a 10-day Restaurant Week in 2026.





## 5. A FESTIVAL FINDS ITS FOOTING: TUSCALOOSA OKTOBERFEST

Tuscaloosa Oktoberfest was reimagined with a new venue and enhanced programming, drawing over 4,000 attendees and demonstrating strong community appetite for signature festival experiences. The event's success validates our product development strategy, creating compelling experiences that serve residents while attracting visitors and filling gaps in our event calendar. There were growing pains with the new venue that the team quickly identified and will work through for the 2026 festival.

## *Sales & Business Development Efforts*

## 6. PRO SOFTBALL CAME TO TUSCALOOSA: ATHLETES UNLIMITED

Through the efforts of Visit Tuscaloosa's sports sales team, Tuscaloosa hosted Athletes Unlimited Softball League's regular season games and inaugural Championship Series at Rhoads Stadium — broadcast on ESPN and featuring Alabama legend Montana Fouts. The event generated over 900 room nights and \$2 million in economic impact during a slow summer period.

## 7. GROWING OUR HBCU ATHLETIC CONFERENCE PARTNERSHIP WITH BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL:

Building on a growing relationship with the HBCU Athletic Conference, Visit Tuscaloosa secured the HBCUAC Baseball and Softball Championships for 2026–2028, with River Run Park and local hotels accommodating teams. This multi-year commitment deepens a partnership that has already proven to be a reliable source of weekday economic impact for our community.

## 8. A NJCAA CHAMPIONSHIP COMES TO OUR GREENS:

Visit Tuscaloosa secured the NJCAA Division II Women's Golf Championships for 2026–2028, adding a recurring multi-year championship event to our growing sports tourism portfolio and bringing competitive collegiate golf to Tuscaloosa County for years to come.



# 2025 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## 9. 75+ TRAVEL STORYTELLERS, COMING TO TUSCALOOSA IN 2027:

Visit Tuscaloosa secured the 2027 Southern Travelers Explore Conference, which will bring over 75 travel writers, content creators, and journalists to experience Tuscaloosa County firsthand. This is one of the most impactful earned media opportunities our organization has ever secured — putting our community's story directly in the hands of the people who tell it.

## 10. A NEW ANCHOR FOR SPORTS TOURISM: RIVER RUN PARK

Visit Tuscaloosa partnered with the City of Northport on the grand opening of River Run Park, a premier facility that is already anchoring new sports tourism conversations. Our team is actively facilitating baseball and softball event opportunities that will drive significant economic impact across the entire community for years to come.

## 11. SHOWCASING TUSCALOOSA TO LEGISLATIVE LEADERS - SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE:

Visit Tuscaloosa's tourism sales team welcomed 60 attendees from the Southern Legislative Conference — headquartered in Birmingham — for an immersive tour of Tuscaloosa. Guests experienced Bryant-Denny Stadium, the Catherine and Pettus Randall Welcome Center, the Paul W. Bryant Museum, and the Bryce Hospital Museum, giving state leaders a firsthand look at what makes our community a compelling destination.

## 12. CONNECTING WITH CAMPUS PLANNERS: UA EVENT PLANNERS WORKSHOP

Visit Tuscaloosa participated in the University of Alabama's Campus Event Planners Workshop at the Bryant Conference Center, connecting directly with the planners who drive meetings, conferences, and events across one of the largest campuses in the Southeast. Director of Tourism Jasmine Rainey, TMP, spoke during the program, while Destination Services Manager Naytalia Douglas represented the organization at the vendor expo — strengthening relationships that can translate directly into future bookings.





## *Glimpse into New Business Wins 2025*

- ARPA Men's and Women's Basketball Championships
- Athletes Unlimited Softball Series
- Volley Central Volleyball Tournament 2025
- T-Town Explosion 2025
- SYBL Bama Bash
- Alabama Hoops
- 2026 Alabama Funeral Directors and Mortician Associations's 87th Annual Conference
- Irondale Senior Center Day Tour
- Sun Tours: Alabama Mystery Tour 2026
- T-Town Classic
- T-Town Spring Fling Volleyball
- 2025 ARSEA Regional Meeting
- 2027 Rotary Multi-District Conference
- 2026 - 2028 HBCU AC Baseball and Softball Championships
- 2027 Southern Travelers Explore Annual Conference
- 2026 SPRF Annual Conference
- 2026 - 2028 NJCAA DII Women's Golf Championships
- 2026- 2028 Gulf South Conference Men's & Women's Tennis Championships

# MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

## 1. TUSCALIFE BRAND LAUNCH:

On June 5, Visit Tuscaloosa unveiled TuscaLife, a new brand platform celebrating the experiences that make Tuscaloosa County unique — from iconic moments to hidden gems. Created through local partnerships and featuring original music from Stillman College, the campaign is a dynamic invitation to discover everything our community has to offer.

## 2. NEW WEBSITE:

Visit Tuscaloosa launched a new VisitTuscaloosa.com — our primary digital storefront for converting travel inspiration into bookings. The site has been continuously refined post-launch based on performance data and user feedback, while strategic SEO enhancements ensure Tuscaloosa remains competitive in both traditional and AI-driven search results.

## 3. STRATEGIC PR PARTNERSHIP & NATIONAL RECOGNITION:

In alignment with our strategic plan, Visit Tuscaloosa established a new public relations partnership with Lou Hammond Group to amplify destination promotion through regional

and national media — and the results came quickly. Within months of the partnership launching, Tuscaloosa earned two significant national recognitions: Tinsel Trail was named the #4 spot on USA Today's 10Best Public Holiday Lights list, and The Local Palate named Tuscaloosa one of their 2025 Top 20 Culinary Towns in the South.

## 4. TUSCALOYAL - INVITING ALUMNI BACK TO TOWN:

We deepened our relationship with The UA Alumni Association, including an insert in their magazine reaching nearly 25,000 alumni households nationwide. The TuscaLife advertisement invited alumni to rediscover Tuscaloosa's evolving food scene, festivals, and attractions — positioning the city as a compelling weekend destination, not just a gameday stop.

## 5. TRAVEL WRITERS & CONTENT CREATORS:

Visit Tuscaloosa hosted travel influencers and writers including Heather Montgomery, a mother and travel influencer based in Knoxville; Bri and Chris Mitchell, travel content creators who experienced Tuscaloosa

during the Alabama vs. LSU gameday weekend; and Kathleen Walls, a travel writer whose work appears in publications such as Family RVing Magazine, Extended Weekend Getaways, and Deep South.

## 6. SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT:

In 2025, our owned social media channels reached a combined audience of over 150,000 followers — a 22% increase — while generating nearly 24 million impressions and 11 million video views, delivering consistent visibility for Tuscaloosa County at no additional media cost. While these numbers reflect meaningful organic reach, social media is just one channel in Visit Tuscaloosa's broader omni-channel marketing strategy, working alongside PR, influencer partnerships, digital advertising, and earned media to inspire travel and build destination awareness at every stage of the planning journey.

## 7. TUSCALOOSA MERCHANDISE:

We opened a small retail shop within the Visitor Center, offering visitors and locals alike a tangible way to rep our community.



# 2025 SALES GOALS & RESULTS

## **GOAL: BOOK OVER 32,000 ROOM NIGHTS AND 23 NEW BUSINESS WINS IN 2025.**

Result: The sales team had a productive year with over 29,000 room nights booked and 20 new business wins (while retaining many prior year events). Ultimately, we felt short of our goal due to unforeseen circumstances and decisions beyond our control, but continued to build significant momentum for 2026. The team also distributed 181 hotel leads throughout the year.

## **GOAL: FACILITATE OVER 340 INTENTIONAL CLIENT CHECK-INS TO PURSUE NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES.**

Result: Through trade shows and conferences, as well as local and statewide business development efforts, the sales team exceeded this goal with 700+ client check-ins. These check-ins were with existing and new clients, but specifically focused on new business opportunities that could be held in Tuscaloosa County.

## **GOAL: FACILITATE 12 SITE VISITS AND / OR FAM TRIPS.**

Result: Between the sales team and marketing/PR team, we facilitated or hosted nearly 15 site visits and/or FAM Trips. It's important to note that in some cases, these site visits or FAM Trips encompassed multiple people or organizations.

## **GOAL: INCREASE ECONOMIC IMPACT 3 PERCENT THROUGH GROUP TOURISM EFFORTS.**

Result: Through the 160+ events that Visit Tuscaloosa recruited, supported, or assisted in 2025, our efforts helped generate \$24 million in economic impact. This reflects a 4.5% growth from the year prior.

## **GOAL: INCREASE ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERS THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND EVENTS.**

Result: We interacted with our partners 150+ times beyond hotel leads. This communication ranged in topics, from opportunities for training and professional development, participation in events, check-ins and welcome notes with new employees and more. We hosted eight partner events, giving us an opportunity to engage and interact in person and continue to reimagine our monthly insights newsletter making it an insightful and informative monthly communication for our partners and stakeholders. Additionally, the President and CEO implemented quarterly Executive Updates to local elected officials and board members.

## **GOAL: ENGAGE WITH NEW BUSINESS PROSPECTS THROUGH 11 TRADESHOWS AND CONFERENCES.**

Result: Through 14 trade shows, staff pitched Tuscaloosa to groups of tour operators, meeting planners, sports organizers, media, and individual travelers throughout the year. The sales and marketing team facilitated nearly 300 one-on-one meetings with decision makers while attending their shows.

## **VISIT TUSCALOOSA 2025 EVENT ECONOMIC IMPACT:**

# **\$24 MILLION**

Please note this economic impact number only represents the impact of events. This does not account for strategic marketing efforts that drive demand and sales throughout the year.

## **VISIT TUSCALOOSA 2025 TAX REVENUE GENERATED:**

# **\$1.6 MILLION**

This represents the minimum tax revenue dollar amount Visit Tuscaloosa helped generate back to our community through our 2025 events. \$600,000 of this was lodging tax alone.

## **VISIT TUSCALOOSA 2025 ROOM NIGHTS:**

# **23,000**

This represents the room nights that were fulfilled in 2025 through events, site visits, and FAM Trips.

## VISIT TUSCALOOSA TEAM



**Kelsey Rush, TMP**  
President / CEO

### **SALES & SERVICING:**

**Jasmine Rainey, TMP**  
Director of Tourism

**Josh Rivers**  
Director of Community Partnerships and Group Tour Experiences

**Robins Bonner**  
Senior Sports Sales & Event Development Manager

**Alicia Richards, M.S.**  
Event & Partnership Services Manager

**Naytalia Douglas**  
Destination Services Manager

### **MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS:**

**Jimmy Hart**  
VP of Marketing and Communications

**Chelsea Barton Kelly**  
Marketing Content Manager

**Hannah Gills**  
Social Media Contract Manager

### **OPERATIONS & FINANCE**

**Loretta Jones**  
Director of Finance and Operations

**Toby Wilson, Chairman**  
Wilson Hospitality

**Justin Holt, Vice Chairman**  
Southern Ale House & Deli Press

**Steve Edmonds, Treasurer**  
Windwood Management Group

**Dennis Conner, Secretary**  
Tuscaloosa City Schools

**Samyra Snoddy, Executive Committee**  
City of Tuscaloosa

**Evan Malone, Executive Committee**  
Randall-Reilly

**Max Karrh, Executive Committee**  
Bryant Bank

**Councilman Lee Busby**  
Tuscaloosa City Council

**Chris Cunningham**  
Tuscaloosa County

**Heather Dill**  
The Alamite

**Dr. Brent Hardin**  
University of Alabama Adapted Athletics

**Dr. LaJuan Hutchinson**  
The University of West Alabama

**Doug Killough**  
City of Tuscaloosa

**Mark Nelson**  
Tuscaloosa County

**Darren Segura**  
AC Hotel Tuscaloosa

**Chad Tindol**  
The University of Alabama

**Tera Tubbs**  
City of Northport

**Exa Skinner**  
Kentuck Art Center & Festival

**Brian Davis, Ex-Officio**  
Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority



## HOW IS VISIT TUSCALOOSA FUNDED?

Visit Tuscaloosa, legally known as Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission, is funded by the City of Tuscaloosa, the City of Northport, and Tuscaloosa County. Each year, Visit Tuscaloosa goes through the application process for agency funding from these entities and receives an appropriation from general funds. Additionally, Visit Tuscaloosa utilizes a portion of the .5% Tourism Enhancement Fund lodging tax collection with the City of Tuscaloosa, which enables our sales team to recruit and support tourism events. Visit Tuscaloosa strives to generate additional revenue through events, grants, sponsorships, and corporate partners.



