

# 2025 BUSINESS PLAN



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**“Western New York is fortunate to have the steak – legitimate tourist draws, as well as the sizzle – a smart visitor’s bureau. May this never be taken for granted.”**

*-The Buffalo News Editorial Board  
October 8, 2023*

About Visit Buffalo Niagara.....	3
Erie County Visitor Spend & Tourism Employment.....	4
Visit Buffalo Niagara Community Vitality Wheel.....	5
Visit Buffalo Niagara Destination Audiences.....	6
Visit Buffalo Niagara Visitor Profile.....	7
Erie County Neighborhoods.....	8
Visit Buffalo Niagara Social Inclusion Assessment.....	9
2025 Travel Trends.....	10-23
Marketing & Communications Plan.....	24-26
Sales & Services Plan.....	27-29
Destination Development Plan.....	30-33
Research Plan.....	34-35
Administration & Finance Plan.....	36-38
Measuring Results / Key Performance Indicators.....	39-40

# ABOUT VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA

## ABOUT US

Visit Buffalo Niagara was incorporated on March 4, 1987, and is governed by a Board of Directors responsible for the administration and operation of the organization.

VBN employs a staff of talented tourism professionals dedicated to promoting tourism and accomplishes this by soliciting national, state and regional meeting planners, motor coach tour operators, travel agents and independent consumers. In 2023, \$2.4 billion dollars in traveler spending occurred in Erie County, generating \$143 million in tax revenue. That's \$648 in tax savings per household in Erie County.

## VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA FUNDING

Erie County provides an annual grant to Visit Buffalo Niagara, and this funding comes from visitors themselves when they stay in local hotels. In 2025, \$9.5 million from Erie County is being provided to Visit Buffalo Niagara for all marketing and sales efforts through hotel/motel and short-term rental bed tax collections.

## BRAND POSITIONING STATEMENT

Buffalo Niagara provides authentic and unexpected experiences to inquisitive explorers. The region's revitalized waterfront, restored architecture, thriving arts scene, culinary renaissance, vibrant neighborhoods, outdoor activities and historic charm make it a not-to-be-missed treasure.

## MISSION

Transforming our community by inspiring visitors and locals to discover Buffalo and Erie County.

## VISION

To be the most surprising destination you will ever visit.

## CORE VALUES

### We Are Proud

Tireless dedication and love for our community, and its people, is where we find the greatest sense of accomplishment.

### We Are Good Neighbors

Here, there is something for everybody - and everyone is welcome. There's a reason they call us the City of Good Neighbors.

### We Are Resilient

Through times of uncertainty to momentous achievements, we carry out our mission with unwavering focus.

### We Lead the Way

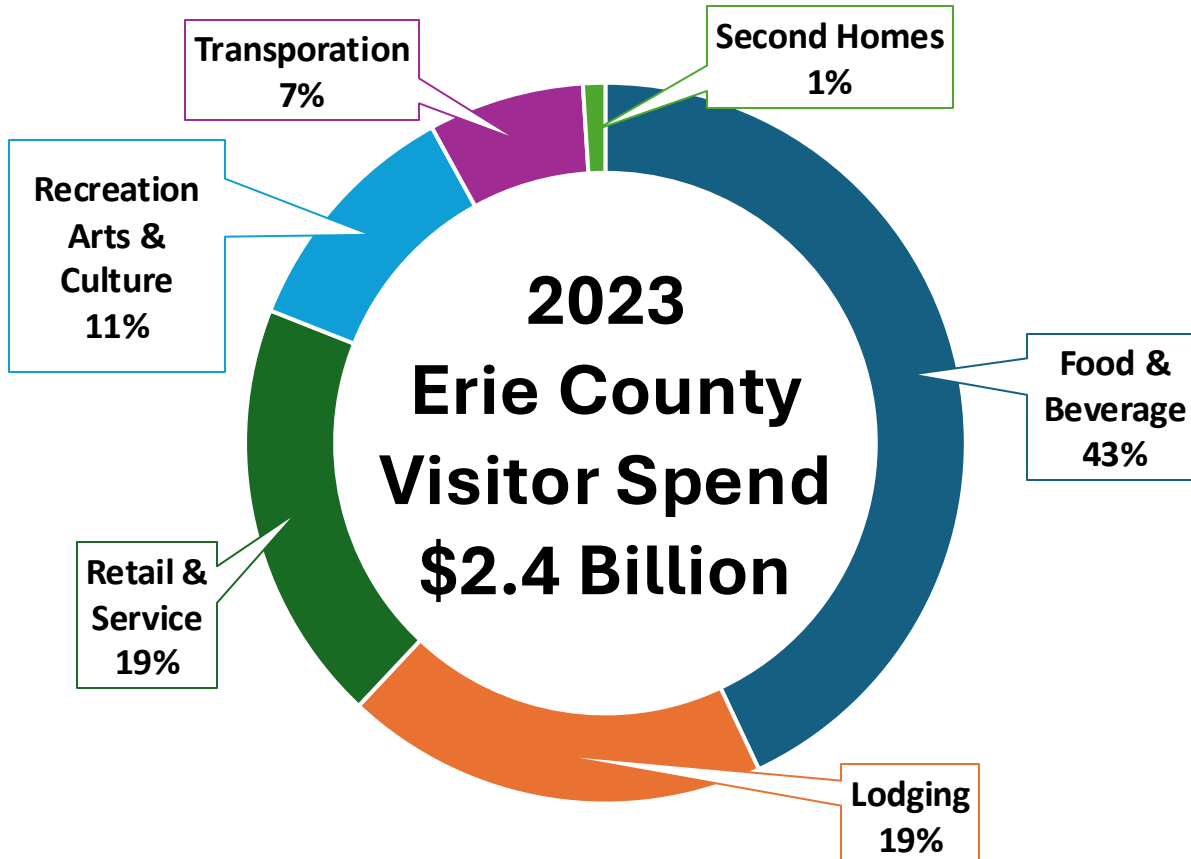
Driven by forward-thinking practices and boundless creativity, we motivate locals to share their stories and inspire visitors to discover something unexpected.

### We Are Home

Buffalo is forever our home. And our guests will feel like family when they're here. That is our promise.

# ERIE COUNTY VISITOR SPEND & TOURISM EMPLOYMENT

In 2023, visitor spending in Erie County grew by 11.2% to a record high of \$2.4 billion. Erie County constituted 64.5% of the Greater Niagara five-county Region's tourism tax base.



## TOURISM – GENERATED TAXES

Visitor spending in the five-county Greater Niagara region increased by 11% relative to 2022. Erie County represents 64.5% of the region's tourism sales, with \$2.4 billion in direct tourism spending.

If it were not for tourism-generated state and local taxes, the average household in Erie County would have to pay an additional \$594 to maintain the same level of government support.

	Local Taxes	State Taxes	Total	Tax Savings Per-Household
Erie County	\$143,587M	\$119,787M	\$263,366M	\$648

## TOURISM – GENERATED EMPLOYMENT & INCOME

Tourism in the Greater Niagara region generated \$1.2 billion in direct labor income and \$1.9 billion, including indirect and induced impacts. Total labor income, including indirect and induced impacts, was the most significant in Erie County at \$1.3 billion. Erie County produced the most tourism-related jobs in the Greater Niagara region.

	Total Employment	Total Labor Income
Erie County	28,650	\$1.3B

# VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA COMMUNITY VITALITY WHEEL

## 1. VISIT

If you built a place where people want to visit, then you have built a place where people want to live.

## 2. LIVE

And if you built a place where people want to live, then you have built a place where people want to work.



## 4. INVEST

And if you built a place where business and residents will invest, then you have built a place where people will want to visit.

## 3. WORK

And if you built a place where people want to work, then you have built a place where business and residents will invest.

# VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA DESTINATION AUDIENCES

TRADE	CONSUMER	STAKEHOLDERS	MEDIA
<p><b>Convention &amp; Meeting Planners:</b> National, state and regional association planners, independent/third party planners with an emphasis on the following sectors: Advanced Manufacturing, Agriculture, Educational, Engineering/Technology, Ethnic/Multicultural, Government, Health/Medical, Hobby/Vocational, Fraternal, LGBTQ+, Military, Religious, Science/Environmental, Unions, Social</p> <p><b>Sports Event Planners:</b> National, state and regional and local club organizations targeting all potential athletic/sport events, competitions and tournaments</p> <p><b>Travel Trade:</b> Domestic and international operators, receptive tour operators for group and individual travel</p>	<p><b>Age:</b> 25-64</p> <p><b>Drive Markets:</b> Greater Toronto Area, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New York State and Western New York residents</p> <p><b>Current Direct Flight Markets:</b> Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Denver, Detroit, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Meyers, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Nashville, Newark, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Raleigh-Durham, Sarasota, Tampa, Washington</p> <p><b>International:</b> Austria, Australia, China, Japan, England, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, Switzerland</p> <p><b>Interests:</b> Architecture, arts and culture, heritage and history, culinary, craft beer and spirits, LGBTQ+, year-round outdoor recreation, state, county and city parks, generational travel</p>	<p>Elected officials</p> <p>Board of directors</p> <p>Partner businesses</p> <p>Tourism industry (State, Regional, Local)</p> <p>County chambers of commerce</p> <p>County economic development agencies</p> <p>Civic and community groups</p> <p>Local, state and county agencies</p> <p>Local residents</p> <p>Customers</p>	<p>International, national, and regional lifestyle and travel media</p> <p>Travel related social media influencers</p> <p>Convention trade media</p> <p>Sports trade media</p> <p>Travel trade media</p> <p>Local, state and regional media</p> <p>Sport-specific enthusiast media</p>

# VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA VISITOR PROFILE

## OVERNIGHT DOMESTIC VISITOR TO ERIE COUNTY

- 3.1 million person-trips
- Average daily per person expenditure: \$211
- Average # of nights spent in Buffalo: 2.9
- 64% traveled to Buffalo by car
- 34% planned their trip in one month or less
- 56% stayed in a hotel
- 70% of visitors were between the ages of 25-54
- 70% had a college degree or more
- Top 5 States of Origin: NY, CA, FL, IN, NC
- Top 5 Activities: Shopping, Sightseeing, Landmark/Historic Sites, Attending Celebrations, Attending pro/college sports events

## DAYTRIP VISITOR TO ERIE COUNTY

- 4.2 million person-trips
- Average per-person expenditure: \$79
- Average length of trip: 4.9 hours
- Top 5 Origin Markets: New York, NY; Rochester, NY; Syracuse, NY; Erie, PA; Philadelphia, PA
- Top 5 Activities: Shopping, Casino, Bar/Nightlife, Landmark/Historic Site, Hiking
- 57% of visitors were between the ages of 25-54

# ERIE COUNTY NEIGHBORHOODS

Buffalo and Erie County are bursting with colorful neighborhoods, each offering its own unique niche. Whether visitors are interested in a small-town feel that's rich in history or an up-and-coming, hot-spot sprinkled with art galleries and live music, Buffalo and Erie County has got it.

## CITY, TOWNS & VILLAGES

Buffalo	Kenmore
Clarence	Lancaster
East Amherst	Orchard Park
East Aurora	Springville
Gowanda	Tonawanda
Grand Island	West Seneca
Hamburg	Williamsville

## NEIGHBORHOODS

Allentown	Old First Ward
Arts District	Niagara Street
Black Rock	Parkside
Broadway-Filmore	Kaisertown
Elmwood Village	Larkinville
Fillmore District	Michigan/Jefferson
Five Points	Avenues
Grant Street	South Buffalo
Hertel Avenue	University Heights

## WESTERN NEW YORK REGIONAL ATTRACTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Niagara Falls

*State Park and surrounding attractions*

Ellicottville

*Skiing*

Chautauqua County

*Institute and fishing*

Jamestown

*National Comedy Center*

# VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA SOCIAL INCLUSION ASSESSMENT



## COMMUNITY TRUST & VITALITY AND VIBRANT ECONOMIC GROWTH

In 2025, Visit Buffalo Niagara will be utilizing the Social Impact Assessment Tool by Destination's International. The SIA is designed for destination organizations to measure progress toward our inclusion goals. Visit Buffalo Niagara will assess our workplace dynamics, operations, policies, vendor selection, community engagement, accessibility, board governance, and destination stewardship efforts.

# TOURISM ECONOMICS: 2025 KEY TOURISM THEMES

1. **The impact of the incoming Trump Administration** remains uncertain, but tariffs, immigration policy, and rhetoric are key to shaping the outlook.
2. **Political unrest remains a backdrop** to the travel landscape, influencing international visitor flows, travel behavior, costs, and market volatility.
3. **Consumer sentiment is rising across all income brackets.** With wage growth ahead of inflation, households have benefitted from wealth gains, fueling strong leisure travel intentions.
4. **Corporate investment continues to outpace broader GDP growth,** supporting U.S. business travel, which grew 5.5% in 2024 and is expected to reach 98% of pre-pandemic levels in 2025.
5. **Cruise is experiencing a rapid resurgence.** Passenger volume will exceed 18 million in 2025, an 8% increase from 2023 and 28% above the 2019 baseline of 14.2 million.

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: DOMESTIC TRIPS

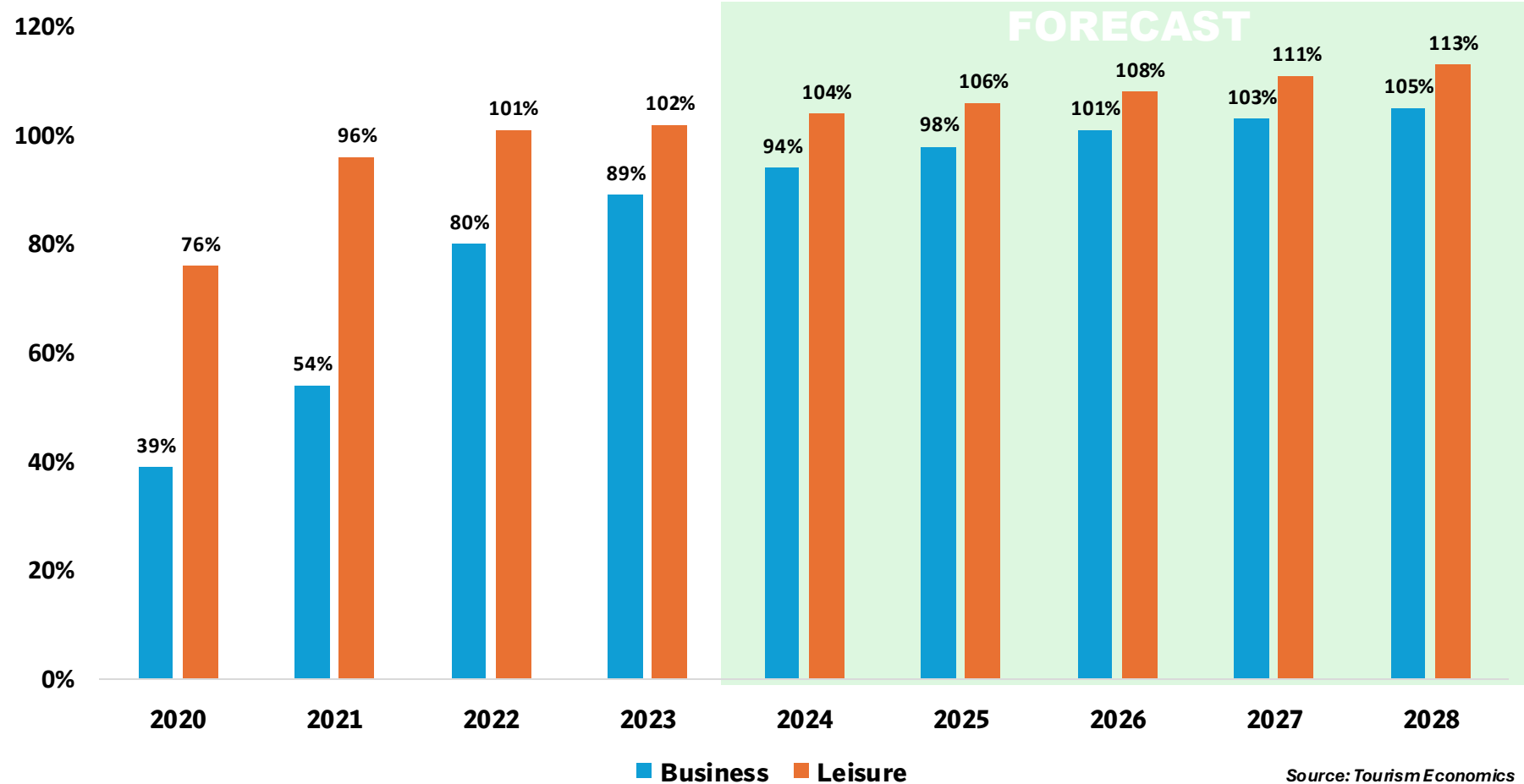
## Domestic travel to remain healthy as business travel recovers

The **domestic leisure** segment has led to overall travel recovery and is forecast to grow steadily in the coming years.

The ongoing return of business travel will support future domestic travel growth. The number of **domestic business** travelers are forecast to increase by 5.5% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025. Complete recovery of the segment is anticipated in 2026.

## Domestic Trips

### Business and Leisure Trips (as a percent of 2019)



Source: Tourism Economics

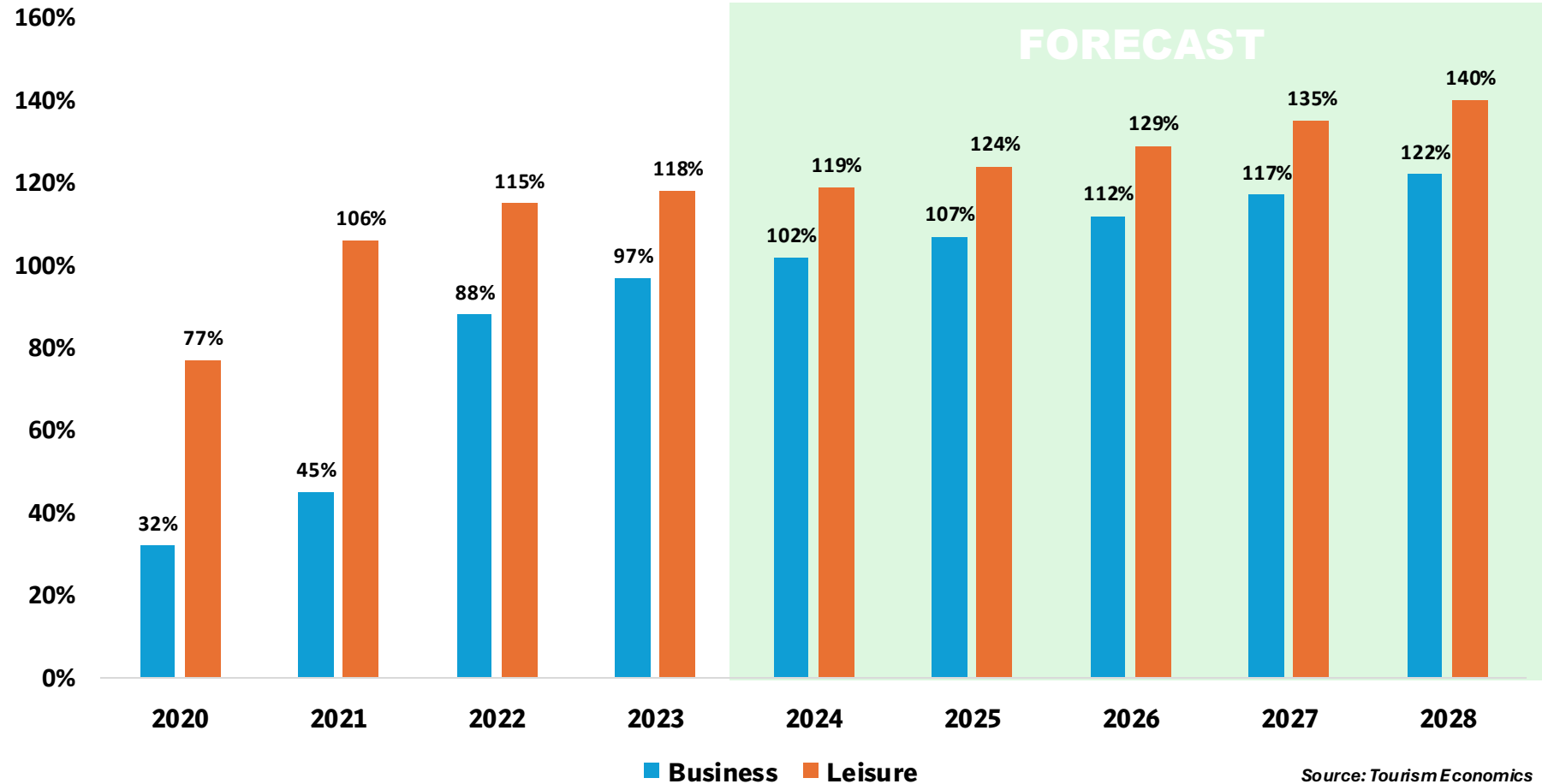
# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: DOMESTIC SPENDING

## Domestic spending growth supported by resilient US consumers

**Domestic leisure** growth decelerated through the first three quarters of 2024, as consumer spending has been moderating to more sustainable levels. Solid household balance sheets, a resilient labor market, and easing inflation pressures are tailwinds to domestic travel spending.

**Domestic business travel** expenditures were estimated to surpass 2019 levels for the first time in 2024, propelled by the continued rebound in group travel spend.

## Domestic Spending Business and Leisure Expenditures (as a percent of 2019)



Source: Tourism Economics

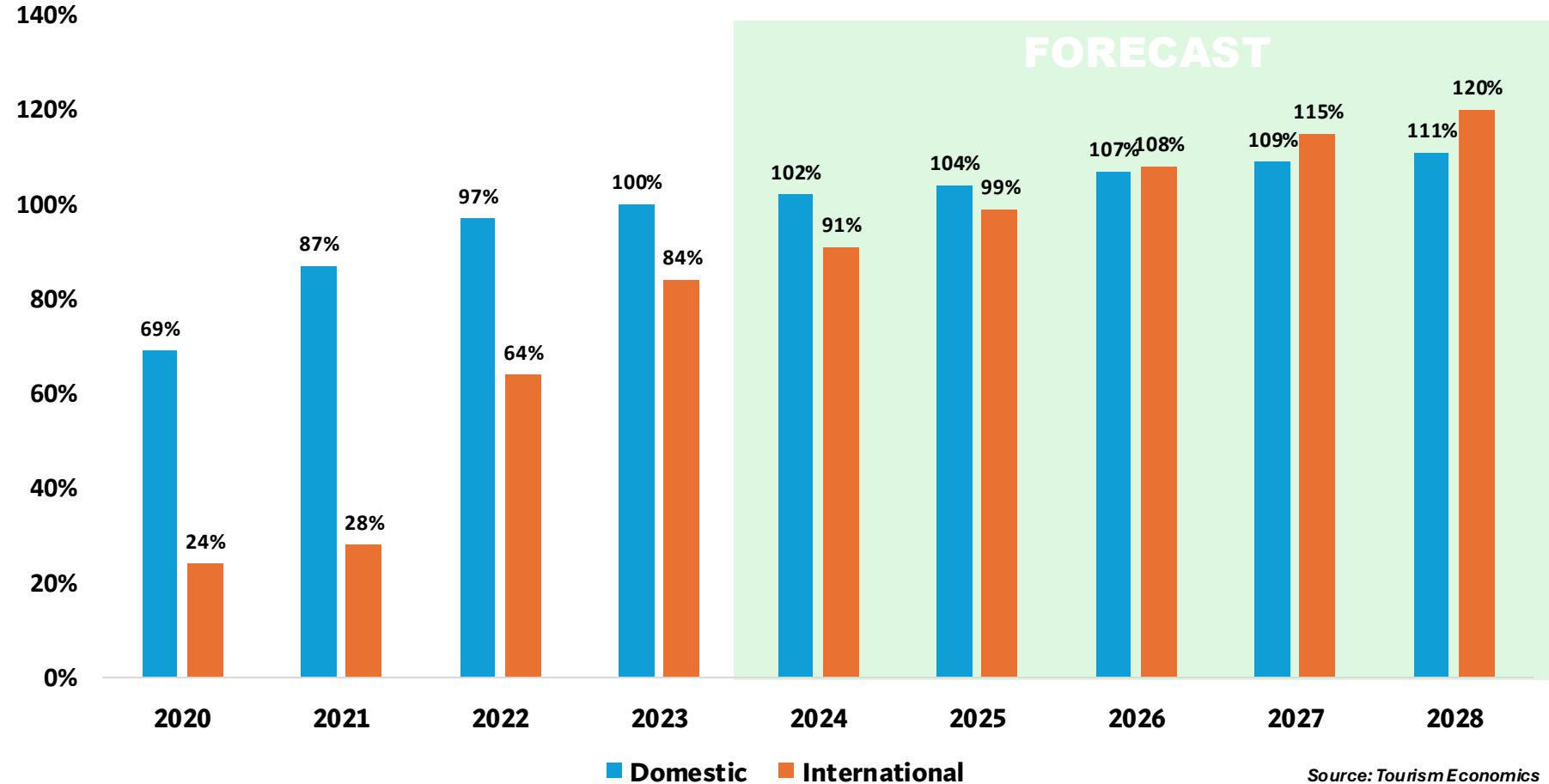
# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: INTERNATIONAL TRIPS

**International travel on pace to recover by 2026, but heightened geopolitical tensions stand as a major risk**

**Inbound international visits** experienced strong growth in 2024, although gains slowed as key Asian markets have seen more gradual recovery paces over the past year. The continued recovery of these markets as well as prominent global events support expectations of continued robust growth in the near term.

**International visits** are expected to recover to 2019 levels in 2026, but heightened geopolitical tensions stand as a downside risk to the outlook

## International Trips Domestic and International Trips (as a percent of 2019)



Source: Tourism Economics

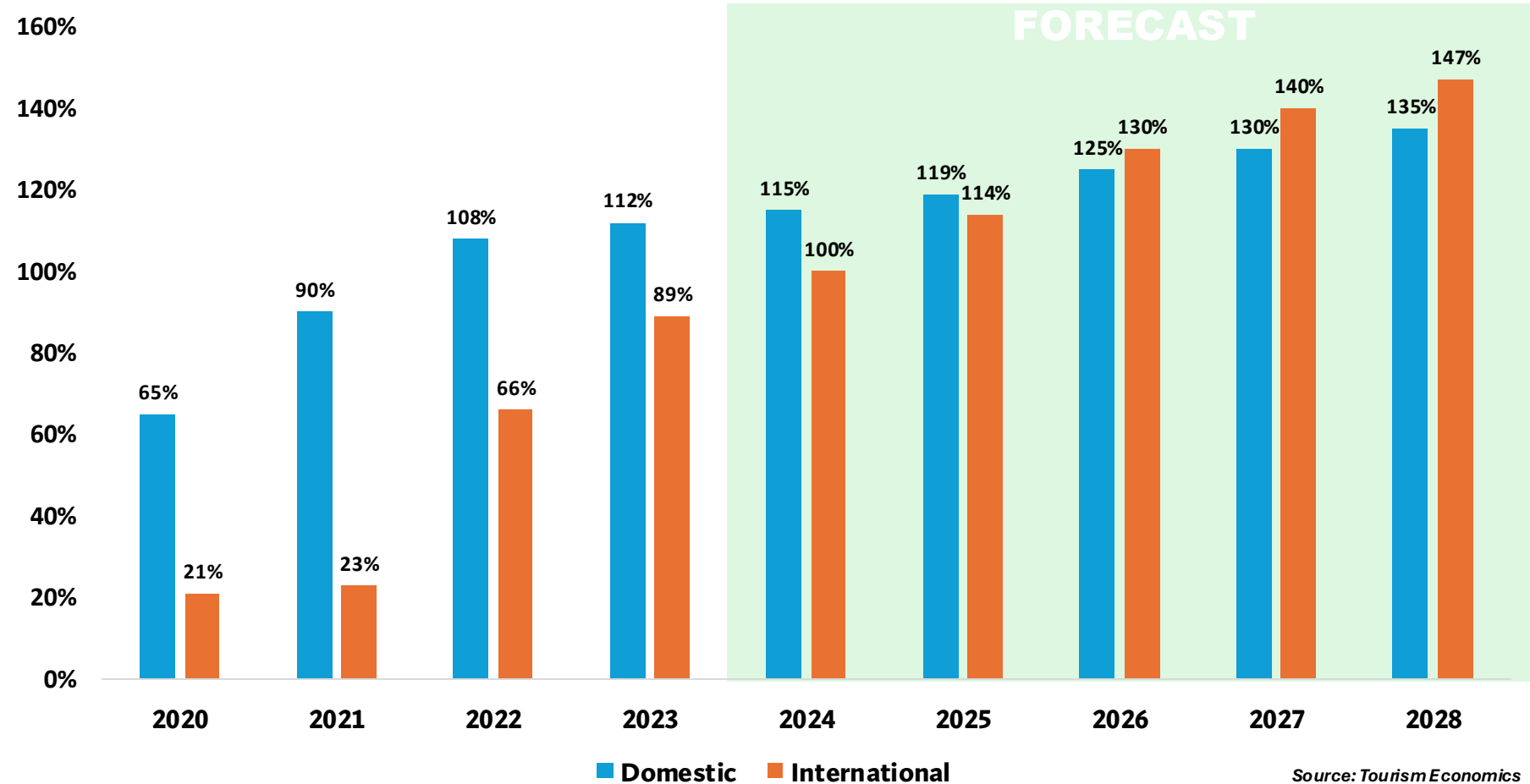
# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: INTERNATIONAL SPENDING

## International spending outlook supported by recovering demand

**Inbound international travel** spending was on pace to grow 13% in 2024, with gains spread across both the business and leisure segments. The near-term international spending outlook is propelled by the visitation recovery and prominent global events including the World Cup in 2026 and the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

**Inbound international spending** recovered to 2019 levels in 2024, led by the leisure segment. The recovery in international business spending will trail the overall recovery slightly, returning to pre-pandemic levels in 2025.

## International Spending Domestic and International Expenditures (as a percent of 2019)



Source: Tourism Economics

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: INTERNATIONAL TRIPS

## Recovery varies among key international markets

While the full recovery in international arrivals is projected for 2026, there are some notable differences between countries. Among our top 10 inbound markets in 2019:

- **India** recovered in 2023;
- **Canada, Mexico, France and Germany** are expected to recover in 2025, based on data from Tourism Economics;
- Followed by the **United Kingdom, South Korea, and Brazil** (2026);
- **China** is expected to recover two years later (2028);
- **Japan** is projected to take the longest to recover, returning to 2019 levels in 2029.

## International Trips

Recovery Timelines of Top Ten Inbound Markets  
(ranked in order of 2019 visitations)

Canada	2025
Mexico	2025
United Kingdom	2026
Japan	2029
China	2028
South Korea	2026
Brazil	2026
Germany	2025
France	2025
India	2023

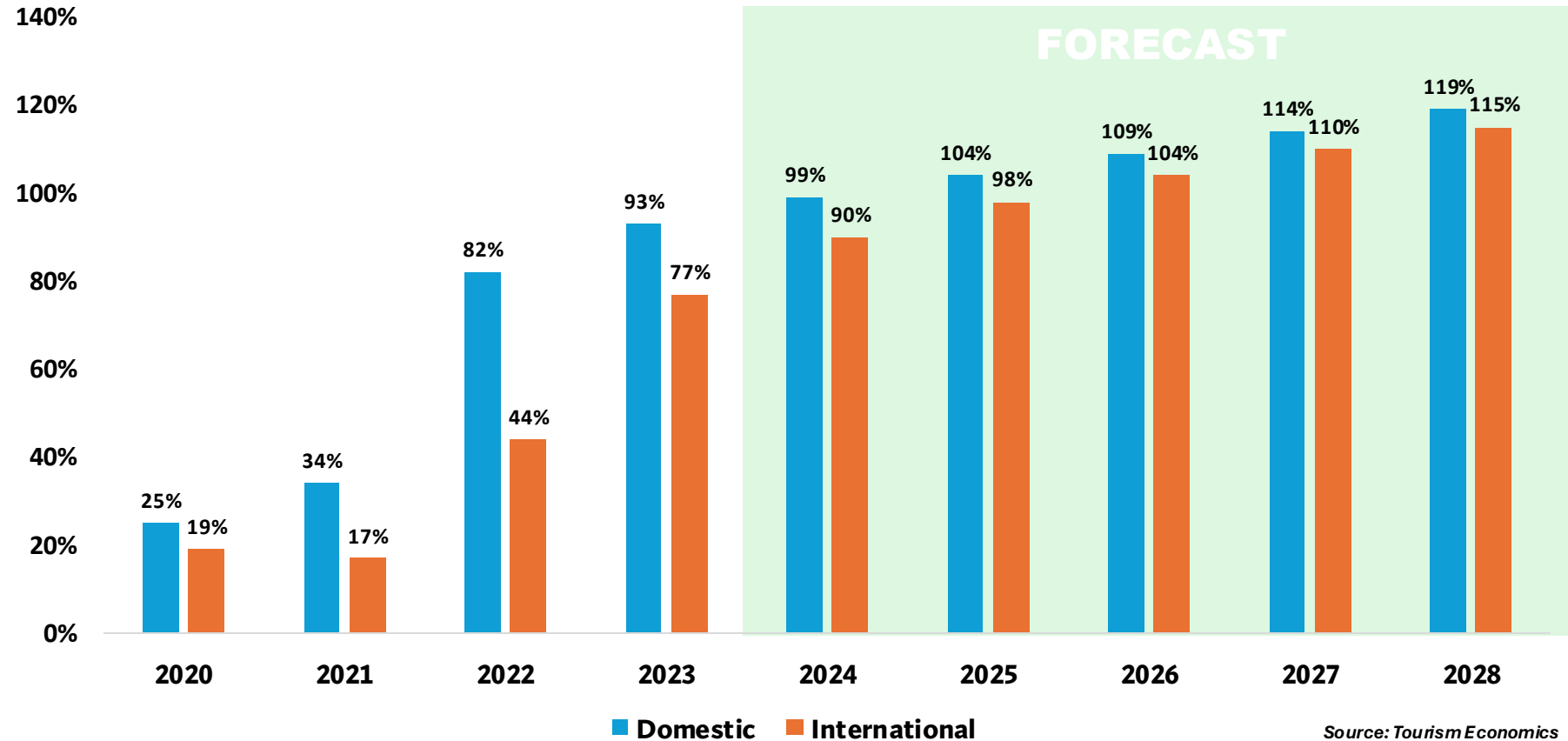
Source: Tourism Economics

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: GROUP BUSINESS SPENDING

Group business travel is expected to grow more rapidly than transient

Group business travel generally consists of travel to meetings, events or trade shows.

## Group Business Spending Domestic and International Group Business Expenditures (as a percent of 2019)



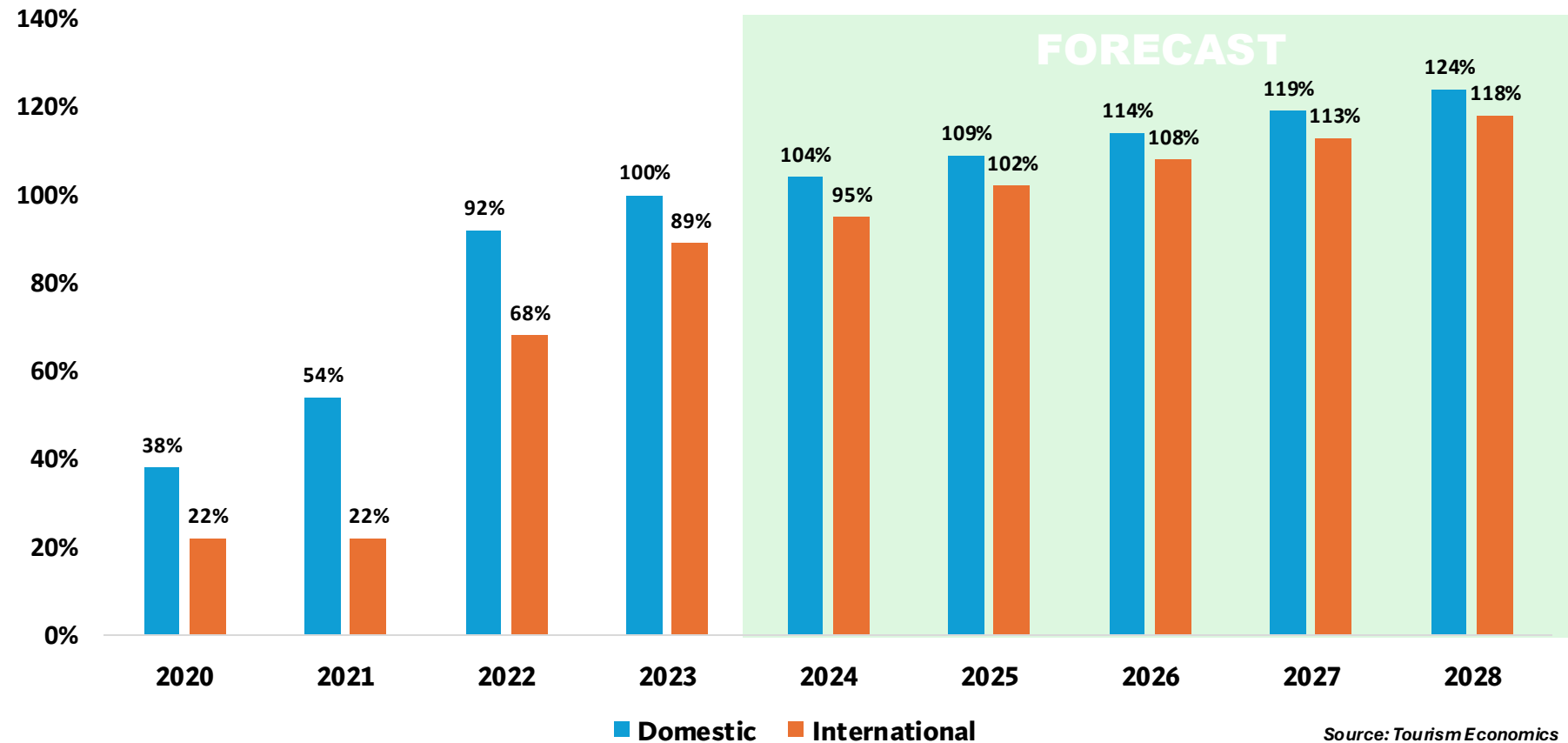
Source: Tourism Economics

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: TRANSIENT BUSINESS SPENDING

**Transient business spending will continue to grow at a healthy pace**

Transient business travel generally, consists of individual or small group business trips for general business needs such as visiting clients, making sales calls, repairing or servicing equipment or receiving training.

## Transient Business Spending Domestic and International Transient Business Expenditures (as a percent of 2019)



Source: Tourism Economics

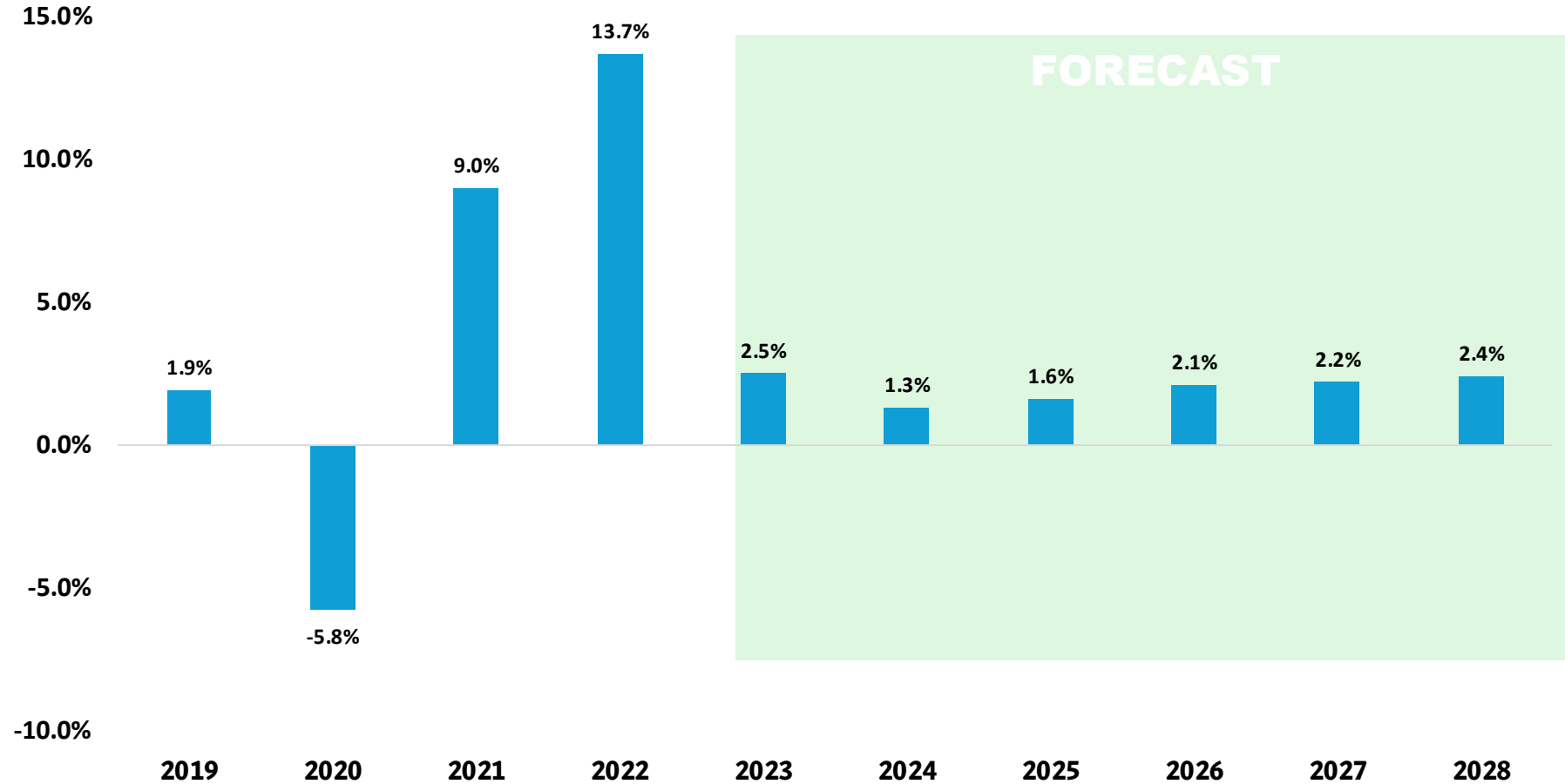
# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: TRAVEL PRICE INDEX

## Travel price pressures continue to ease

Travel price growth has slowed considerably over 2023-24, largely due to falling motor fuel prices and more modest price increases for hotels and restaurants.

Travel price growth is expected to remain modest over the forecast period as well, averaging 2.0% over 2025-2028. This average trails overall inflation expectations for the same period (2.4% annual average).

## Travel Price Index Year-Over-Year % Change



Source: Tourism Economics

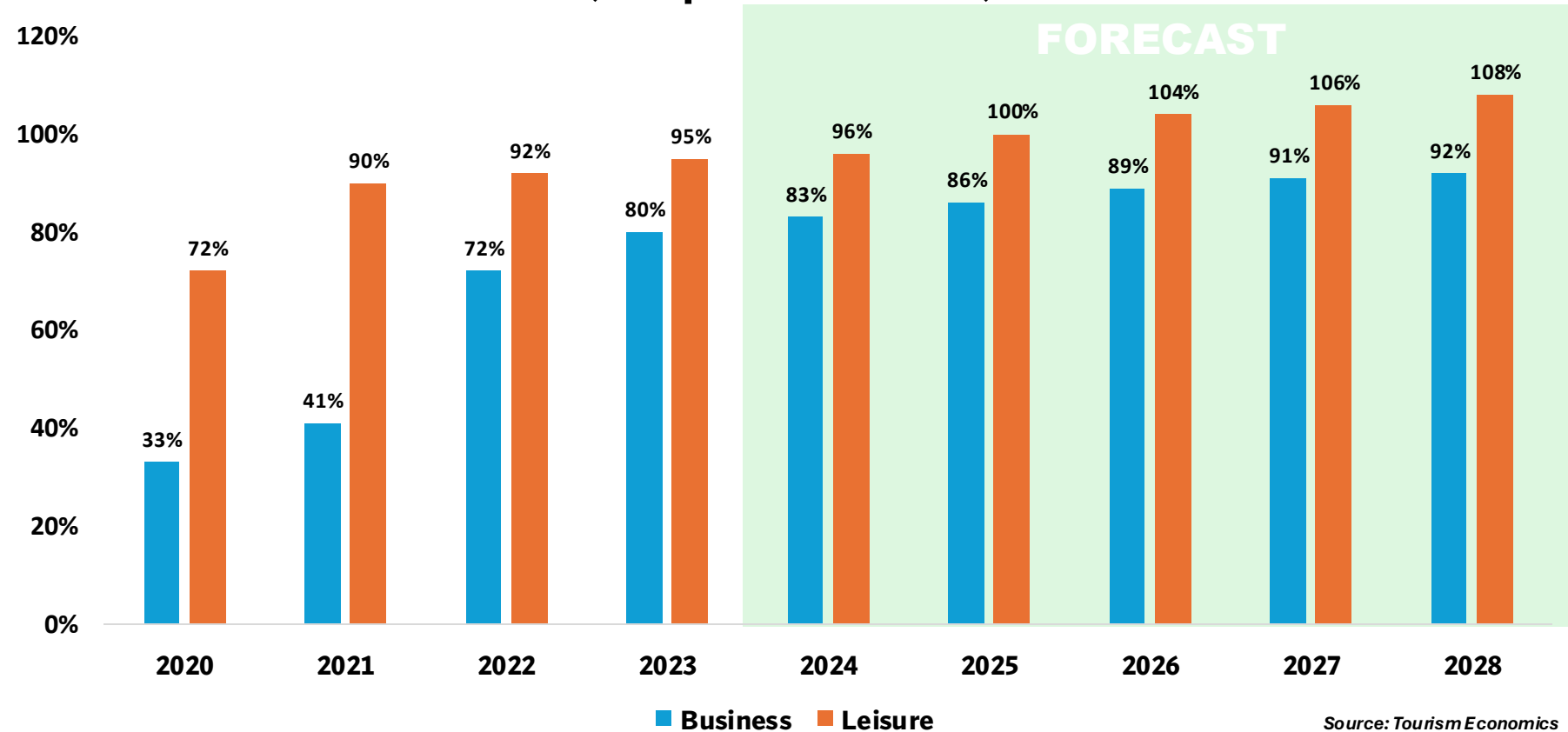
# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: INFLATION-ADJUSTED EXPENDITURES

**Real business travel spending will take years to recover**

**Leisure:** While nominal (non-inflation adjusted) leisure spending exceeded 2019 levels in 2021, real (inflation adjusted) leisure spending is not forecast to reach pre-pandemic levels until 2025.

**Business:** Likewise, business travel spending when adjusted for inflation shows a more delayed recovery than nominal business spending estimates suggest.

## Inflation-Adjusted Business and Leisure Expenditures (as a percent of 2019)



Source: Tourism Economics

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: 2025 ECONOMY FORECAST



## Economic Output

The U.S. economy is set to remain on solid footing in the near term, supported by the continued normalization of interest rates over 2025-36 and expansionary fiscal policy under the incoming Trump administration.



## Consumers

Many households have benefited from wealth gains as real incomes continue to grow at a healthy pace. While there are visible signs of stress among low-income households, the outlook for consumer spending is more dependent on middle- and high-income households, and the strength of their balance sheets suggests the risks to spending are skewed to the upside over the coming years.



## Inflation




Inflation is inching toward the Fed's 2% goal, though the path will be bumpy. Shelter is sticky, but signs are it will continue to cool over the coming year. The softening labor market will keep services inflation trending lower, while deflation in China will help ease goods prices.



## International

Inbound international visits paced to strong growth in 2024, although gains slowed as the sluggish recovery from key Asian markets continues to drag the overall overseas recovery. The continued recovery of these markets, as well as future global events, support expectations of continued inbound recovery in the near term. Heightened geopolitical tensions stand as the downside risk to the outlook.

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: 2025 HEADWINDS AND RISKS

 <b>Domestic Leisure</b>	 <b>Domestic Business</b>	 <b>International</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Softening in travel demand, particularly among middle- and low-income groups</li><li>• A rise in the personal savings rate following the recent drawdown of savings</li><li>• A sustained rise in unemployment</li><li>• An uptick in inflation and motor fuel prices due to escalated conflict in the Middle East</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cost-cutting measures such as limiting the number of employees attending meetings and conferences</li><li>• Continued acceptance of virtual meetings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Potential policy impacts</li><li>• Prolonged visa wait times</li><li>• Strengthening of the dollar</li><li>• Increased geopolitical tensions</li><li>• Long-haul travel from China is weak as domestic recovery is prioritized within China</li></ul>

# SKIFT RESEARCH: 2025 DISCRETIONARY PURCHASE

## Travel Ranked the Most Important Discretionary Purchase in the World

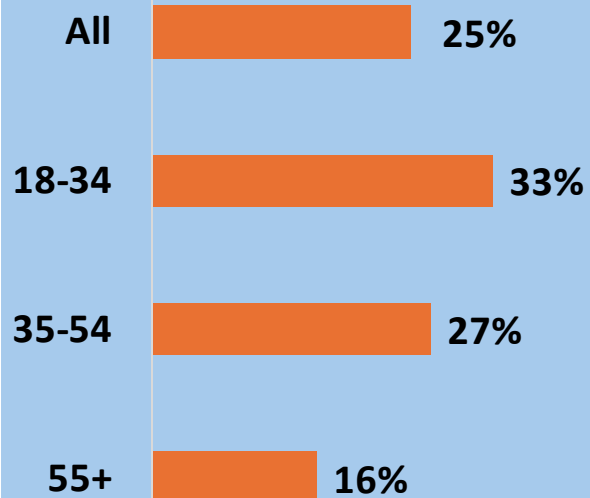
Q: Which discretionary expenses are you most excited to spend on in 2025? Please select all that apply.

	U.S.	UK	Germany	China	India
Travel	1	1	1	1	1
Dining and entertainment	2	2	3	2	2
Electronics and gadgets	4	3	4	3	4
Home improvements	3	4	5	5	5
Jewelry	6	5	2	4	6
Fashion and accessories	7	6	6	6	3
Wellness and fitness	5	7	7	7	7

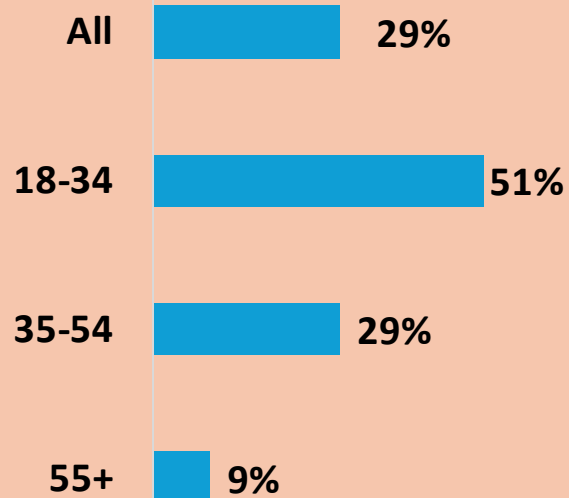
Skift Research Travel Outlook Survey, n = 258 (U.S.), 324 (UK), 261 (Germany), 257 (China), 529 (India).  
Data as of December 2024.

# TOURISM ECONOMICS: AI TECHNOLOGY

**“I need to be connected to technology at all times when undertaking leisure trips.”**



**Used artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT to research/plan an overnight leisure trip**



**Potential contribution to the global economy of widespread AI adoption (GDP impact over 10 years)**

**\$7 trillion**

**“Artificial intelligence and new technologies, like ChatGPT, will make the tourism industry more successful.”**

(% agree among tourism experts)

**71%**

# SALES & SERVICES PLAN

## PURPOSE

The primary goal of the Visit Buffalo Niagara Sales & Services Department is to promote Buffalo and Erie County as a convention, group tour, and amateur sports competition destination, thus initiating direct economic impact by increasing hotel room night production for area hotel partners and incremental sales for restaurants, cultural attractions, and transportation companies.

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025

- Host African American Travel Conference
- Host Small Market Meetings
- Host World Canals Conference
- Host co-branded Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA) FAM for Faith-Based Meeting Professionals
- Co-op with ILNY to host International Tour Operator FAM
- Host United States College Athletic Association National Basketball Championships
- Convene 12<sup>th</sup> annual Customer Advisory Council Meeting
- Focus on convention center needs dates to source and connect with planners
- Through Erie County departments and economic development partners, identify regional business/industry strengths, experts, thought leaders, and intellectual capital
- Work with local experts and thought leaders to identify and bid on their related association/industry meetings and conventions
- Continue to grow domestic and international inbound market tour sales efforts through targeted in-market sales missions and partnerships with tour operators and third-party online travel agencies
- Identify and book amateur sporting events that can be hosted in Erie County
- Facilitate Visit Buffalo Niagara's Book Club and create thematic itineraries related to book selections

## Goal #1

Identify, pursue, and confirm meetings/conventions, amateur athletic events, and travel trade business.

### OBJECTIVES

Increase definite bookings over 2024 productivity

### STRATEGIES

- Analyze, maintain, and monitor a healthy and aggressive pipeline.
- Qualify prospect planners and move qualified prospects through the sales process until the conclusion of a booked event
- Target marketing and sales efforts to key meeting & event planners.
- Monitor and track lost business

# SALES & SERVICES PLAN

## Goal #1 Continued

Identify, pursue, and confirm meetings/conventions, amateur athletic events, and travel trade business.

### OBJECTIVES

Grow future business leads

### STRATEGIES

- Cultivate relationships with planners, sports rights holders, and tour operators through direct and indirect sales tactics
- Offer competitive booking incentives for organizations seeking multi-day conventions/meetings and amateur athletic events
- Strengthen partnerships with major third-party sourcing companies to further promote Buffalo as a top convention destination that inspires confidence for meeting planners and convention delegates
- Host targeted site visits and familiarization tours in key industry segments
- Continue to foster relationships with the regional business community and economic development partners through quarterly sales initiative meetings, participation in local business events as well as VBN-hosted industry events.

## Goal #2

Drive destination awareness and interest among meeting planners, sports rights holders, and tour operators.

### OBJECTIVES

Heighten Sales Department industry awareness and marketing/communications initiatives

### STRATEGIES

- Deploy strategic advertising and marketing campaigns across all target markets
- Update and maintain the accuracy of online presence on PlayEasy, MINT, ESSAE, Cvent, and other microsites
- Utilize DigiDeck software platform to create customized proposals and presentations
- Convening 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Customer Advisory Council meeting
- Successfully host the African American Travel Conference, Small Market Meetings Conference, and Religious Conference Management Association FAM
- Successfully host World Canals Conference, United States College Basketball Championships
- Explore sponsorship or other hosting opportunities to further destination brand to target audiences
- Facilitate Buffalo Book Club
- Develop and promote a comprehensive Buffalo Convention Center meeting package

# SALES & SERVICES PLAN

## Goal #3

Provide exemplary services resulting in highly satisfied meeting planners, sports organizers and tour operators.

### OBJECTIVES

Preserve a high standard of event servicing and related economic impact

Leverage technology to improve service delivery, streamline communication and enhance overall efficiency

### STRATEGIES

- Leverage involvement with Event Service Professionals Association to provide current and best servicing practices
- Cultivate relationships with planners and events rights holders in the definite stage of transfer from sales to services
- Welcome attendees to the destination and provide information and resources for destination experiences
- Coordinate the use of volunteers with mobile visitor center and information tables for meetings/conventions, sporting events and tours
- Utilize digital planning tools to allow clients to view available services and pricing options online
- Maintain industry partner awareness through communications of meetings/conventions, sporting events and tour dates
- Measure meeting/convention planner sports rights holder and tour operator destination and services satisfaction with post-event electronic surveys

## Goal #4

Improve client satisfaction and retention.

### OBJECTIVES

Enhance client experience with personalized services, proactive communication, and tailored solutions to boost satisfaction and retention

### STRATEGIES

- Regularly gather client feedback through surveys, interviews, and reviews. Use insights to adjust services and address challenges
- Create a program to reward long-term clients, offering exclusive benefits
- Develop a streamlined new client process that welcomes and educates them to destination offerings
- Maintain a database of planners who have worked with Visit Buffalo Niagara in the past and who would be willing to offer testimonials of their experience working with VBN and holding their events in Buffalo and Erie County

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## PURPOSE

The Marketing Department is responsible for connecting visitors to the destination. We invite travelers to explore the diverse experiences our region has to offer. Our team leverages real-time insights and emerging platforms to meet potential visitors where they are, creating tailored, compelling messages that resonate at each stage of their travel journey. Our aim is to build a bridge between visitors and local partners, driving meaningful visitation that enriches the community and showcases the best of Buffalo.

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025

- Begin relationship with new Agency of Record (MMGY) and Public Relations firm (Lou Hammond Group) to establish new brand, messaging, creative and story pitches
- Freedom's Footsteps African American Marketing Initiative
- International Marketing Initiative
- 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Erie Canal
- AI adoption

## Goal #1

Drive year-round visitation to the destination.

### OBJECTIVES

Launch a new destination brand and campaign

### STRATEGIES

- Introduce Buffalo as a travel destination in two emerging markets
  - Execute a shoulder season campaign in the fall through an online travel agency (OTA)
  - Update all collateral to reflect the new brand
  - Capitalize on the 2025 highlights in our destination that include the promotion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Erie Canal, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Juneteenth, continued progress at Ralph Wilson Park, re-opening of the Colored Musicians Club & Museum and more
- 
- Become an authoritative source for visitors or locals to find and support Black-owned businesses in Buffalo
  - Secure new visual assets through photography and video to promote the newly reopened Colored Musicians Club and Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor
  - Celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the annual Juneteenth Festival

Continue development of Freedom's Footsteps Marketing Initiative

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## Goal #1 Continued

Drive year-round visitation to the destination.

### OBJECTIVES

Continue promotion of Buffalo's core pillars – Arts & Culture, Outdoor Recreation, Food and Music

Launch a Canadian & International Marketing Initiative

### STRATEGIES

- Create and promote two distinct cultural areas within the city – Cultural Corridor and Downtown Entertainment District
  - Work with local neighborhoods, within the city and suburbs, to launch a neighborhood mural program
  - Develop more content around Public Art
  - Rollout new 'Flight 716: Buffalo Architecture From Above' video
  - Reimagine the architecture section of website
  - Sponsor Boarderland Music + Arts Festival to further establish Buffalo's national reputation as a music destination
  - Launch a new Hiking Guide to Buffalo
  - Produce new local hiking trails videos
  - Collaborate with Erie County and key partners on an enhanced winter experience
  - Work with a local artist and key Theater District partners to create a Harold Arlen-inspired mural in the Theater District
  - Create the 'Classic Buffalo Food Trail'
- 
- Develop an effective campaign to re-engage with the Southern Ontario market in Q3/Q4
  - Secure new imagery to market Buffalo to an international audience
  - Work with key partners in the UK & Germany for product training and in-office sales visits

## Goal #2

Increase visitor engagement through our print, digital and social channels.

### OBJECTIVES

Maintain and enhance organization's website

Maintain and enhance social media channels

Produce variety of printed collateral, including the annual Buffalo Visitor Guide

### STRATEGIES

- Create robust content to interest and inspire visitors
  - Enhance the web experience by including more inspiring photography, video, maps, and storytelling
  - Incorporate AI features into the website to aid in visitor planning
- 
- Work with an extended network of local content creators to supply VBN with more short-form video footage
  - Explore YouTube Shorts strategy
  - Celebrate our 100,000<sup>th</sup> follower on Instagram
  - Create meaningful content to nurture and grow followers
- 
- Work with a new vendor to produce and publish the 2026 Buffalo Visitor Guide
  - Update all collateral to reflect the new brand
  - Re-imagine Visitor Map in new pad format
  - Produce first-ever Winter Guide for 2026 season

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## Goal #2

Continued

Increase visitor engagement through our print, digital and social channels.

### OBJECTIVES

Produce new long-form and short-form video content

### STRATEGIES

- Rollout 'Flight 716: Buffalo Architecture From Above' drone video
- Produce a new African American Heritage-themed video
- Develop concept and gather assets for a waterfront-focused video with a 2026 debut
- Produce videos in-house that focus on individual neighborhoods
- Gather footage for the Q4 winter video launch
- Work with more diverse vendors

## Goal #3

Increase our usage of AI-based tools.

### OBJECTIVES

Continue to learn about new ways to leverage the benefits of AI

### STRATEGIES

- Incorporate AI-based web tool, GuideGeek, into the organization's website to aid in visitor trip planning
- Work with a select group of staff on an ongoing basis to discuss new ways to utilize AI technology to enhance our day-to-day tasks

## Goal #4

Provide Marketing & PR support for the Sales & Services team.

### OBJECTIVES

Enhance the meetings, sports and group sales efforts through marketing and public relations

### STRATEGIES

- Develop a new sales branding campaign to engage with planners, sports rightsholders, and group tour operators.
- Collaborate with the Sales team on a new video
- Produce new tradeshow booth
- Work with local photographers to add to the photo library
- Identify story angles to pitch to trade publications

## Goal #5

Generate more coverage about Buffalo as an attractive travel and meetings destination.

### OBJECTIVES

Develop new and improved PR strategy utilizing new agency

### STRATEGIES

- Establish clear and measurable goals with public relations firm
- Develop thematic story arcs for efficient and effective story pitching
- Generate coverage by attending tourism media-based tradeshow
- Generate media coverage by setting up desk-side appointments, media events and receptions

# DESTINATION EXPERIENCE PLAN

## PURPOSE

The Destination Development Department drives sustainable growth by enhancing the region's tourism infrastructure, workforce, and experiences while prioritizing community well-being and environmental stewardship. The department fosters collaboration with local stakeholders through strategic initiatives and partnerships to balance tourism growth with community needs, ensuring Buffalo remains an attractive, inclusive, and culturally vibrant destination. By addressing long-term challenges and opportunities, the department supports economic vitality, visitor satisfaction, and residents' thriving quality of life.

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025

- Restructure and kick off Freedom Footsteps
- Launch the Certified Travel Ambassador program
- Cultural Tourism Advisory Board Formation
- Research new cultural heritage products
- Development of a new destination culinary program for 2026
- Canalside visitor center opening

## Goal #1

Create sustainable products to boost destination appeal, support communities and the environment, foster economic growth, and fulfill traveler needs with long-term stakeholder value.

### OBJECTIVES

Finalize preparations to launch Freedom's Footsteps in 2025 following the completion of Michigan Street Heritage Corridor improvements

Collaborate with the Marketing Department and Michigan Street Heritage Corridor to identify and execute opportunities under the Market ILNY Grant

Create a unique week-long destination culinary experience for 2026 (a non-restaurant week event)

### STRATEGIES

- Restructure the project into a sustainable model to showcase immersive African American experiences designed for FAM tours and larger groups
- Coordinate a visit with Corridor leadership to experience the Unfiltered Truth project in Louisville, KY

- Partner with the Marketing Department to align grant initiatives with promotional strategies
- Identify priority projects within the Michigan Street Heritage Corridor that align with the Market ILNY Grant goals
- Develop a timeline and actionable plan for grant execution
- Monitor progress and evaluation outcomes to ensure the effective use of grant resources

- Create a task-force that includes local chefs and culinary experts
- Research other destinations' culinary promotions/experiences

# DESTINATION EXPERIENCE PLAN

## Goal #1 Continued

Create sustainable products to boost destination appeal, support communities and the environment, foster economic growth, and fulfill traveler needs with long-term stakeholder value.

### OBJECTIVES

Provide exceptional visitor information services

- Open and operate the new visitor information center at Canalside in partnership with ESD
- Schedule and staff mobile visitor center at high profile and attendance events around Erie County

Research developing a Hispanic heritage tourism immersive experience.

- Collaborate with local Hispanic leaders and organizations for authentic input
- Conduct market research to identify the target audience and key elements
- Identify culturally significant sites, stories, events, and traditions

Organize a low-maintenance planting project for the Buffalo Convention Center garden to honor former VBN board member Gail Wells.

- Partner with East Side Garden Walk and Grassroots Gardens
- Apply for the Gardens Buffalo Niagara Lunenfield Beautification Grant for additional funding
- Select sustainable and climate-appropriate plant species
- Install a commemorative marker honoring Gail Wells
- Develop a maintenance plan to ensure the garden remains vibrant

### STRATEGIES

## Goal #2

Implement skill-building programs for the community and tourism industry to boost competitiveness, ensure sustainability, and reinforce the organization's new brand identity.

### OBJECTIVES

Launch the Certified Tourism Ambassador™ (CTA) program

### STRATEGIES

- Develop a tailored training curriculum and certification framework
- Partner with local tourism businesses and community leaders to promote participation
- Recruit participants through targeted outreach to hospitality professionals and volunteers
- Train internal facilitators to deliver high-quality workshops
- Launch a pilot program, gather feedback, and refine the content
- Highlight certification benefits to participants and the tourism industry
- Measure impact with metrics like participation and visitor satisfaction

# DESTINATION EXPERIENCE PLAN

## Goal #2 Continued

Implement skill-building programs for the community and tourism industry to boost competitiveness, ensure sustainability, and reinforce the organization's new brand identity.

### OBJECTIVES

Broaden the reach of the CTA initiative by developing a diversified suite of industry-related products

Reimagine the annual Tourism Summit to coincide with the release of the New York State Economic Impact of Visitors Report, and incorporating the return of the annual Tourism Awards program

### STRATEGIES

- Increase CTA recruitment by optimizing partnerships with Buffalo School of Culinary Arts & Hospitality Management (PS 355), Erie Community College, and Buffalo State University Hospitality students
- Develop a CTA continuing education curriculum for ambassadors and industry partners
- Present social media training workshops
- Launch new expert-led workshops to deliver high-value education to the restaurant industry
- Align the summit agenda with key findings from the 2025 Empire State Development Economic of Visitor Spend report
- Relaunch the tourism awards program to celebrate industry achievements
- Collaborate with stakeholders to identify impactful topics and speakers
- Promote the event through targeted marketing to maximize attendance
- Evaluate attendee feedback to refine future events

## Goal #3

Form a Cultural Tourism Advisory Group to steer cultural tourism initiatives, align with community values, and enhance the region's cultural appeal.

### OBJECTIVES

Form the Cultural Tourism Advisory Group with diverse community representation

Utilize the advisory group to guide cultural tourism initiatives

Enhance cultural tourism marketing and engagement

### STRATEGIES

- Identify and invite representatives from cultural organizations, local leaders, and stakeholders
- Develop clear roles and responsibilities for advisory group members
- Host an inaugural meeting to set goals and priorities
- Conduct regular meetings to gather input on tourism development projects
- Collaborate on identifying and promoting key cultural assets
- Integrate feedback into the planning and execution of cultural tourism campaigns
- Partner with the Sales and Marketing Departments to create campaigns highlighting cultural attractions
- Leverage advisory group insights to target diverse visitor demographics
- Develop events and programs that celebrate and showcase local culture

# DESTINATION EXPERIENCE PLAN

## Goal #4

Provide exceptional visitor services to enhance satisfaction, engagement, and repeat visits while showcasing Buffalo's hospitality.

### OBJECTIVES

Provide meaningful interactions with visitors and locals

- Identify new events and locations for mobile visitor center for year-round exposure
- Work with Buffalo Convention Center to train front desk staff as a visitor information kiosk
- Oversee year-long visitor guide distribution program throughout New York State
- Oversee and respond to telephone, email, and website visitor information requests

### STRATEGIES

Implement volunteer program

- Continue to engage existing while recruiting and training new volunteers for opportunities at welcome tables, mobile visitor center, and other potential opportunities to engage with visitors

## Goal #5

Establish a Cultural Tourism Advisory Group to guide the development and promotion of cultural tourism initiatives, ensuring alignment with community values and enhancing the region's cultural appeal.

### OBJECTIVES

Form the Cultural Tourism Advisory Group with diverse community representation.

- Identify and invite representatives from cultural organizations, local leaders, and stakeholders
- Develop clear roles and responsibilities for advisory group members
- Host an inaugural meeting to set goals and priorities

### STRATEGIES

Utilize the advisory group to guide cultural tourism initiatives.

- Conduct regular meetings to gather input on tourism development projects
- Collaborate on identifying and promoting key cultural assets
- Integrate feedback into the planning and execution of cultural tourism campaigns

Enhance cultural tourism marketing and engagement.

- Partner with the Sales and Marketing Departments to create campaigns highlighting cultural attractions
- Leverage advisory group insights to target diverse visitor demographics
- Develop events and programs that celebrate and showcase local culture

# RESEARCH PLAN

## PURPOSE

The Research Department at Visit Buffalo Niagara is critical in supporting the organization's strategic goals through data collection, analysis, and insights. This business plan outlines initiatives to improve tourism data accuracy, enhance reporting capabilities, and provide actionable marketing, sales, and operations insights. By leveraging advanced research methods, data visualization, and analytics tools, the Research Department will empower VBN to make informed, data-driven decisions. This plan includes Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) to measure the department's contributions and effectiveness.

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025

- Development of a Tradeshow ROI measurement
- Extranet training program for industry partners
- Evaluation of internal reporting
- Evaluation of KPIs and OKRs in conjunction with scope of work with new advertising and public relations agencies for 2026

## Goal #1

Enhance data collection and analysis by implementing robust systems to gather, analyze, and report on key tourism metrics, including visitation, economic impact, and traveler behavior.

### OBJECTIVE

Develop a comprehensive data collection framework to ensure accurate and reliable tourism performance and visitor behavior metrics

### STRATEGIES

- Implement tools to track real-time visitor data, including mobile geolocation, visitor surveys, and social media analytics
- Conduct quarterly visitor satisfaction surveys to gather insights on visitor demographics, behaviors, and preferences

## Goal #2

Provide actionable insights for decision-making by delivering accurate and timely reports to inform VBN's marketing, sales, and operational strategies.

### OBJECTIVE

Support VBN's marketing, sales, and operational strategies by delivering accurate and timely insights on market performance and visitor behavior

### STRATEGIES

- Produce monthly, quarterly, and annual reports on visitation trends, market performance, and economic impact
- Develop dashboards that provide real-time access to key performance metrics for internal stakeholders
- Conduct ad hoc analyses to address specific departmental needs, such as campaign performance or target market analysis

# RESEARCH PLAN

## Goal #3

Support market research and trend forecasting by identifying industry trends and emerging opportunities to guide VBN's long-term planning and competitiveness.

### OBJECTIVE

Identify industry trends, market shifts, and emerging opportunities to inform VBN's long-term strategy and competitive positioning

### STRATEGIES

- Conduct an annual market analysis to identify growth opportunities in emerging visitor segments or geographic markets
- Monitor travel industry reports and consumer behavior trends to forecast future demand and challenges
- Collaborate with national and regional tourism organizations to benchmark Buffalo against peer destinations

## Goal #4

Streamline reporting and data visualization by improving the accessibility and usability of research data through user-friendly dashboards and clear visualizations.

### OBJECTIVE

Enhance the accessibility and usability of research data by creating user-friendly reports and dashboards with clear visualizations.

### STRATEGIES

- Develop interactive dashboards that allow stakeholders to access and customize data views
- Standardize report templates to ensure consistency and clarity across all research outputs
- Use data visualization tools to create graphs, charts, and infographics for easier interpretation of complex data

# ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE PLAN

## PURPOSE

The primary goal of the Administration and Finance Department is to provide managerial guidance to all Visit Buffalo Niagara departments related to staffing, management, operational efficiencies, organizational strategic planning, education, and community-based initiatives that position the VBN to be the leader in hospitality and tourism-based economic development for Erie County.

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025

- Oversee a larger organizational budget and associated programming.
- Integrate new strategic plan into organizational initiatives.
- Oversee budget and fiscal operations of the new Canalside visitor information center set to open in late Q2/early Q3.
- Conduct organization's biennial salary review using Destinations International salary and compensation survey.
- Explore the implementation of organizational best practices and standards related to AI.
- Implement and train the senior management team on the new human resources onboarding program and standards.
- Establish and make a local, state, and national advocacy agenda toolkit available to the tourism industry.

## GOAL #1

Provide efficient, ethical and professional direction of operational stewardship functions.

### OBJECTIVES

Maintain excellent organization control and support systems

Ensure a well-trained, motivated, efficient and well-respected professional staff

### STRATEGIES

- Maintain current and accurate organizational financials
- Monitor and enhance organizational internal controls and policies
- Achieve a clean third-party financial audit
- Implement an updated expense reporting system
- Manage office facilities, equipment, technology, office supplies, and inventory
- Meet regularly with Erie County Comptroller and Budget staff to monitor hotel and short-term rental bed tax collections for current and future forecasting
- Achieve and promote Destinations International Destination Marketing Accreditation Program reaccreditation
- Manage employee relations and work with external HR consultants. Manage the recruiting and hiring process as needed
- Ensure the employee policies and procedures are updated continuously to reflect recent laws and legislation.
- Communicate all changes to staff in an efficient manner

# ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE PLAN

## Goal #1

Continued

Provide efficient, ethical and professional direction of operational stewardship functions.

### OBJECTIVES

Improve awareness of inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and sustainability awareness in the organization's workplace and departmental scope of work

Achieve an excellent rating on Board of Directors survey

### STRATEGIES

- Complete Destinations International Social Inclusion Assessment
- Work with national and local partners along with staff to ensure that VBN is implementing and following IDEAS best practices
- Implement new forms of IDEAS training and best practices based on results from Destinations International's Social Inclusion assessment
- Ensure board members are prepared and engaged in organizational operations and governance

## GOAL #2

Externally inspire organizational confidence and respect for Erie County tourism.

### OBJECTIVES

Stakeholder score Visit Buffalo Niagara 80% or higher in leadership, expertise and trust

Represent and advocate on behalf of Erie County tourism industry at national, state and local levels

### STRATEGIES

- Achieve industry and county alignment
- Provide transparent reporting
- Communicate openly
- Serve destination stakeholders
- Maintain membership and participate in legislative activities
- Advocate for tourism/hospitality workforce challenges
- Create a comprehensive advocacy agenda representation of local, state and national issues

# ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE PLAN

## GOAL #3

Reimagine and plan the destination's and organization's present and future.

### OBJECTIVES

Implement strategies focused on destination opportunities and engagement through implementation of the Tourism Master Plan and Strategic Plan utilizing DestinationNEXT standards

### STRATEGIES

- Prioritize destination experience, organizational function, and relevance using the VBN Ten-Year Master Plan as a guide
- Implement the new strategic plan for 2025-2027
- Continue to assess destination tourism needs

## GOAL #4

Maintain VBN's stakeholder relationships and actively participate in collective strategies.

### OBJECTIVES

Work with state and local economic development allies to ensure that Visit Buffalo Niagara has a voice and input on tourism-related projects and plans

### STRATEGIES

- Insure that VBN has a seat at the table and continues to expand the network of advocates and collaborators
- Serve and engage in initiative-taking partnerships and advocacy role with economic development allies
- Utilize stakeholder relations for input on implementing Destination Master Plan and Strategic Plan

## GOAL #5

Provide efficient, ethical and professional direction of operational functions.

### OBJECTIVES

Maintain excellent organization control and support systems

Ensure a well-trained, motivated, efficient and well-respected professional staff

Achieve an excellent rating on Board of Directors survey

### STRATEGIES

- Maintain current and accurate organizational financials
- Achieve a clean third-party financial audit
- Manage a well-structured Human Resources program
- Implement a digital onboarding program for new employees
- Provide professional development opportunities
- Ensure board members are prepared and engaged in organizational operations and governance

# MEASURING RESULTS/KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

## DESTINATION KPIS

KPIs	2019 (recovery benchmark)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Visitor Spend	\$1.8B	\$994M	\$1.7B	\$2.2B	\$2.4B	TBD – Q3 2025
State/Local Taxes	\$228M	\$157M	\$203M	\$240M	\$263M	TBD – Q3 2025
Tourism Employment	32,395	21,911	24,311	27,399	28,650	TBD – Q3 2025
Per-Household Tax Relief	\$596	\$403	\$532	\$594	\$648	TBD – Q3 2025
Hotel Occupancy	61.7%	32.8%	52.1%	59.9%	62.1%	62.6%
Hotel Average Daily Rate	\$106.92	\$87.41	\$107.60	\$124.31	\$133.95	\$143.07
Hotel RevPAR	\$65.97	\$28.67	\$56.10	\$74.43	\$83.18	\$89.19
Hotel Revenue	\$266,269,853	\$111,334,592	\$221,384,220	\$299,754,676	\$309,591,826	\$329,298,053
Short-Term Rental Occ.	-	-	-	35.9%	34.4%	31.9%
Short-Term Rental ADR	-	-	-	\$151.00	\$159.00	\$169.00
Short Term Rental RevPAR	-	-	-	\$54.00	\$56.00	\$54.00
Short Term Rental Rev.	-	-	-	\$29,842,137	\$38,589,258	\$50,522,553
BUF Airport Traffic	4,967,860	-	2,925,792	4,048,306	4,337,662	
Cross Border Traffic	5,232,229	-	1,038,828	2,920,924	3,788,766	

Quantifiable Tourism Industry Standard Best Practices Data Sources: ESD/Tourism Economics, STR, Key Data, NFTA, Bridge Authority

# MEASURING RESULTS/KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

## Departmental KPIs

These are the quantifiable or qualifiable metrics used to measure the effectiveness of each Visit Buffalo Niagara departmental tactics:

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS	SALES & SERVICES MEETINGS/CONVENTIONS, SPORTING EVENTS, TRAVEL TRADE	DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT	RESEARCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Website Traffic (sessions and engagement)</li><li>• Website Page Views</li><li>• Social Media Engagement</li><li>• Video Views</li><li>• Media Placements</li><li>• Media Impressions</li><li>• Media Touchpoints</li><li>• Media Visits</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualified Leads Distributed</li><li>• Lead Room Nights</li><li>• Lead Attendance</li><li>• Lead Economic Impact</li><li>• Definite Bookings</li><li>• Definite Room Nights</li><li>• Definite Attendance</li><li>• Definite Economic Impact</li><li>• Groups Serviced</li><li>• Lost Business</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visitor Center Engagement</li><li>• Visitor Guide Distribution</li><li>• Mobile Visitor Center Events</li><li>• Mobile Visitor Center Volunteer Opportunities</li><li>• Industry Meeting Events</li><li>• Certified Travel Ambassador Training Sessions</li><li>• Certified Travel Ambassador Graduates</li><li>• Certified Travel Ambassador Industry Events</li><li>• In the BUF newsletter distribution</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Weekly Hotel and Short-Term Rental Summaries</li><li>• NYS / Greater Niagara Region Visitor Impact Report</li><li>• Annual Tourism Marketing Summit</li><li>• Visitor Profile Study</li><li>• Zartico Destination Performance Report</li><li>• CRM updates and enhancements</li></ul>