



APACHE COUNTY

STATE OF

*Arizona*

# TOURISM

## MARKETING PLAN

Prepared by Axis Culture Group, LLC 2026





# APACHE COUNTY

STATE OF

*Arizona*

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# APACHE COUNTY

STATE OF

Arizona

## Tourism Marketing Plan for Apache County, Arizona

### Executive Summary

Apache County, Arizona, offers one of the most authentic and under-discovered travel experiences in the state, defined by high-elevation landscapes, expansive outdoor recreation, deep cultural roots, and a slower, more intentional pace of life. From colorful mesas, canyons, cliffs, and volcanic landscapes to forests, lakes, and wide-open skies, the County delivers a dramatic visual experience that feels both adventurous and restorative. Major destination anchors such as Petrified Forest National Park, Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Monument Valley Tribal Park, Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site, and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests provide nationally recognized attractions that already draw visitors to the region and create significant opportunity for longer stays and increased local spending.

Its four-season climate, cooler summer temperatures, and exceptional dark sky conditions create year-round appeal for visitors seeking relief from urban congestion and a stronger connection to nature. From lakes and forests to ranching traditions and Native heritage, the County presents a rare opportunity to develop tourism that is both economically impactful and community-aligned.

Today, Apache County is frequently experienced as a pass-through destination. Visitors travel through the region, often on their way to nearby destinations, without fully engaging in its offerings or contributing to the local economy. **This plan outlines a strategic shift: positioning Apache County as a stay-and-experience destination while preserving the character, environment, and values that make it unique.**

This 3–5 year Tourism Marketing Plan is built from community interviews, in-person stakeholder sessions, and community survey data. It provides a framework to increase tourism-related revenue, extend visitor stays, support local businesses, and protect community identity through targeted, sustainable growth.

### Incorporated Apache County Towns

**St. Johns** (County Seat)

**Eagar**

**Springerville**

# TOURISM-RELATED BENEFITS

In addition to the direct economic impact generated by tourism-related revenue, there are also numerous quality of life benefits for Apache County residents that stem from a strong and sustainable tourism economy. These benefits include increased support for local businesses, expanded funding opportunities for community services, improved infrastructure such as roads, signage, connectivity, and public amenities, and a stronger sense of local pride in the County's culture, heritage, and natural resources. As tourism grows in a responsible and community-aligned way, Apache County's overall economic health strengthens, creating a more vibrant, resilient, and connected community for both residents and visitors.

Below are the recognized tourism benefits identified through community stakeholder interviews, in-person focus groups, survey feedback, and ongoing discussions with local leaders, businesses, and residents throughout the tourism marketing plan development process.

## **Strengthened Local Economy and Job Creation**

Tourism growth will increase local spending across lodging, dining, retail, and recreation while supporting small businesses and encouraging entrepreneurship. By converting existing pass-through traffic into overnight stays, Apache County can unlock new revenue streams and create more consistent economic activity throughout the year.

## **Investment in Infrastructure and Public Services**

Tourism-related revenue can help fund critical improvements such as signage, roads, connectivity, and public amenities. These investments improve both the visitor experience and the quality of life for residents, helping the County build capacity in a way that benefits everyone.

## **Cultural Preservation and Community Identity**

Tourism provides an opportunity to celebrate and preserve Apache County's unique identity, including ranching traditions, Native history, rodeo culture, and rural lifestyle, while fostering community pride. By highlighting what already exists, tourism can reinforce rather than replace local culture.

## **Improved Quality of Life**

Expanded amenities, events, and economic activity contribute to a more vibrant and resilient community. When developed intentionally, tourism enhances, not detracts from, the resident experience and supports long-term sustainability.

# Overall Tourism Marketing Goals

## **Increase Targeted Visitor Engagement**

Apache County will focus on attracting visitors who align with its values. Those who respect the land, appreciate culture, and seek authentic experiences. This ensures that tourism growth is both beneficial and sustainable.

## **Transition from Pass-Through to Destination**

A primary objective is to shift visitor behavior from simply passing through to staying and exploring. While many visitors already come to the County for major attractions such as Petrified Forest National Park, Monument Valley, and Canyon de Chelly, stronger trip planning, local partnerships, and destination marketing can help convert those visits into overnight stays and broader economic impact across surrounding communities. This will be achieved by clearly communicating available experiences, improving awareness, and developing compelling reasons to extend visits.

## **Expand Outdoor Recreation Tourism**

The County will leverage its natural assets, including lakes, forests, hunting, fishing, OHV access, hiking opportunities, volcanic fields, and panoramic high-country landscapes to position itself as a premier outdoor destination for regional and statewide visitors. The combination of scenic drives, wildlife access, camping opportunities, and dark sky stargazing creates a unique outdoor experience that extends beyond traditional recreation and into destination-worthy adventure travel. The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, White Mountains access, and proximity to nationally recognized outdoor destinations create strong appeal for travelers seeking both active recreation and scenic exploration.

## **Promote Heritage and Cultural Assets**

Apache County's Native heritage, ranching culture, historical sites, and local traditions will be elevated through storytelling and marketing efforts that create meaningful and memorable visitor experiences.

## **Support Local Businesses**

Tourism initiatives will intentionally drive traffic to locally owned restaurants, shops, outfitters, and lodging providers, ensuring that economic benefits remain within the community.

## **Preserve Community Values and Resources**

All tourism growth will be approached with a commitment to protecting the County's environment, culture, and way of life, ensuring alignment with resident priorities.

# EXPLORING TARGET AUDIENCES

The ideal target audiences for Apache County's tourism efforts are those who have the financial means to contribute to the local economy, respect the area's natural resources, and maintain a low impact on the community's charm and quality of life, while even enhancing it. The following demographics have been identified as those that are likely to return repeatedly, helping to establish Apache County as a desirable destination for viable, repeat tourism.

# TARGET AUDIENCES

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION ENTHUSIASTS**

These visitors are drawn to Apache County's lakes, forests, and open landscapes, seeking activities such as fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, and OHV riding. They value access, freedom, and authenticity, and typically spend heavily on gear, permits, fuel, lodging, and guided experiences that enhance their time outdoors.

Spending from this audience directly benefits Apache County through purchases at sporting goods stores, bait and tackle shops, outdoor outfitters, campgrounds, RV parks, cabins, and local hotels. Guided hunting and fishing trips, OHV rentals, fuel stations, and convenience stores also see strong revenue from this market. Dining is another major spending area, particularly at locally owned restaurants and cafés where visitors stop before and after recreation activities. Because many of these travelers return seasonally, they represent repeat spending opportunities that create long-term economic stability for local businesses.

## **HERITAGE AND CULTURAL TRAVELERS**

This group is motivated by meaningful connections to place and history. Apache County offers powerful opportunities for this audience through Native heritage, ranching traditions, agricultural identity, museums, ruins, and iconic Southwestern landscapes that reflect the region's deep historical roots. Destinations such as Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site, Monument Valley Tribal Park, and the strong cultural presence of the Navajo Nation and surrounding tribal communities create exceptional opportunities for immersive cultural tourism experiences. Apache County offers powerful opportunities for this audience through Native heritage, ranching traditions, agricultural identity, museums, ruins, and iconic Southwestern landscapes that reflect the region's deep historical roots.

These visitors tend to invest in higher-quality accommodations, guided tours, museum visits, local events, and destination dining experiences. They often seek authentic restaurants, locally owned lodging, and unique retail experiences that reflect the culture of the area. Spending from this group benefits museums, heritage centers, local shops, artisan markets, Western and Native art vendors, and event organizers. They are also more likely to purchase handmade goods, books, jewelry, and cultural souvenirs, helping preserve and support local creative economies.

# TARGET AUDIENCES

## **FAMILY AND REGIONAL TRAVELERS**

Apache County's strongest existing audience consists of families traveling from nearby regions, often in larger household groups. These visitors prioritize affordability, accessibility, and experiences that can be enjoyed together, including fairs, rodeos, outdoor recreation, and community events.

Their spending patterns are centered around value-driven lodging, family dining, event tickets, fuel, and group-friendly attractions. This audience supports restaurants, local diners, hotels, short-term rentals, campgrounds, and family entertainment businesses. They also spend consistently at fairs, rodeos, seasonal festivals, and sporting events, contributing to vendor sales, local concessions, and community fundraising efforts. Because many of these visitors travel regionally and return annually, they create dependable recurring revenue for the County.

## **SEASONAL ESCAPE VISITORS**

Due to its elevation and climate, Apache County naturally attracts visitors seeking relief from extreme heat during the summer months. Cooler temperatures, mountain access, and four distinct seasons make the region especially appealing to summer travelers, retirees, and seasonal visitors looking for a slower pace and more comfortable climate.

This audience often spends more heavily on longer stays, making them especially valuable to local lodging providers, RV parks, vacation rentals, and extended-stay accommodations. They also support grocery stores, restaurants, local retail, farmers markets, and community events over a longer period of time than short-term visitors. Retirees and seasonal residents are also more likely to engage with local arts, volunteer opportunities, and recurring events, strengthening both the economy and community involvement.

## **EVENTS AND SPORTS TRAVELERS**

Regional events, including tournaments, rodeos, and community gatherings, bring in visitors who contribute to the local economy. With strategic planning and improved infrastructure, this audience can become a reliable and recurring source of tourism revenue.

Sports teams, rodeo participants, and event attendees typically travel in groups, creating strong demand for hotels, restaurants, fuel stations, and retail purchases. Families attending youth tournaments often spend across multiple days, supporting breakfast spots, quick-service dining, shopping, and entertainment. Adult event travelers also contribute to wineries, breweries, nightlife, and local attractions after event hours. Expanding this segment creates one of the fastest opportunities for Apache County to increase overnight stays and maximize tourism-related spending.

## **KEY CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS**

### **Infrastructure Limitations**

Apache County currently faces limitations in lodging, dining, connectivity, and wayfinding, all of which restrict its ability to fully support and retain visitors. Addressing these gaps will be critical to long-term success.

### **Seasonality**

Tourism activity is heavily concentrated in the summer months, creating an imbalance that leaves opportunities untapped during other times of the year, particularly in winter.

### **Visitor Conversion**

Many travelers pass through Apache County without stopping or engaging with local businesses. Increasing awareness and providing clear reasons to stay will be essential to improving conversion.

### **Event Retention**

While events bring visitors into the region, a lack of accommodations often results in those visitors staying in nearby areas rather than within the County itself, limiting economic impact.

### **Community Concerns**

Residents have expressed concerns about environmental impact, infrastructure strain, and preserving the County's identity. These concerns must remain central to all tourism planning efforts.



# **MARKETING & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES**

# MARKETING & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES

## **Objective:**

Development of a five-year Tourism Marketing Plan to promote Apache County as a premier destination for outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, and authentic rural Arizona experiences, while fostering strong community pride and preserving the natural beauty, traditions, and values that define the region.

This marketing plan seeks to establish Apache County as a welcoming and economically sustainable tourism destination by leveraging its nationally recognized landmarks, outdoor recreation opportunities, rich Native and Western heritage, and strong sense of local identity. Through strategic branding, media development, digital advertising, event enhancement, and partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, tribal partners, and regional stakeholders, Apache County can position itself as a place where visitors stay longer, explore deeper, and experience the real Arizona.

## **Note:**

Apache County will develop the specific initiatives needed to achieve the identified goals in this plan through ongoing collaboration with local leadership, business owners, community organizations, tribal partners, tourism stakeholders, and residents throughout the county. The pace and prioritization of these initiatives will be guided by available funding, infrastructure readiness, alignment with county strategic priorities, and adjustments made as the plan evolves to ensure tourism growth remains sustainable, community-aligned, and beneficial for residents first.

## **OVERALL BRAND MESSAGING**

### **Core Positioning:**

Apache County is Arizona's authentic escape. Uncrowded, unfiltered, and deeply rooted in nature, heritage, and tradition. Home to some of the Southwest's most iconic landscapes and cultural landmarks, the County offers visitors access to world-renowned destinations while maintaining the authenticity and quiet character of rural Arizona communities. It is a place where visitors can experience the real Arizona through wide-open landscapes, rich community stories, star-filled skies, and a pace of life that feels increasingly rare.

### **Key Messaging Themes:**

The County's messaging will emphasize slowing down and staying awhile, experiencing the real Arizona, enjoying outdoor freedom and wide-open spaces, connecting with heritage and tradition, and embracing affordable, family-friendly adventure. Messaging should also highlight scenic beauty, exceptional stargazing, four-season recreation, and the emotional appeal of escaping crowded destinations for something quieter, more authentic, and more memorable.

### **Storytelling Approach:**

Marketing efforts will focus on real stories, local people, traditions, landscapes, and experiences. Authenticity is Apache County's strongest asset and should be consistently reflected across all platforms and campaigns.

## Media Development Efforts

Apache County will invest in the development of a comprehensive, high-quality media library that showcases the County's most marketable assets, including its dramatic landscapes, outdoor recreation opportunities, cultural heritage, local events, and the people who make the community unique. This foundational media package will include professional photography, videography, drone footage, and short-form digital content that captures the authentic experience of visiting Apache County.

Initial focal points should include natural beauty such as lakes, forests, mesas, canyons, volcanic fields, and scenic drives; major tourism anchors such as Petrified Forest National Park, Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Monument Valley Tribal Park, and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests; community events including rodeos, fairs, parades, and festivals; and the small-town character that defines the County's identity. Special attention should also be given to highlighting dark sky opportunities, seasonal climate advantages, local businesses, and family-friendly recreation.

This media library will serve as the long-term foundation for all tourism marketing efforts, supporting digital campaigns, website content, print collateral, event promotion, partner collaboration, and regional advertising. By owning and continually expanding this content, Apache County can maintain consistent messaging and ensure that all marketing efforts accurately reflect the destination's brand and visitor experience.

## Digital Advertising Efforts

Digital marketing will serve as one of the most effective and measurable tools for increasing tourism awareness, attracting target audiences, and converting visitors into overnight stays and local spending. Because survey results and stakeholder feedback show that word-of-mouth and social media are the strongest drivers of awareness, Apache County's tourism strategy should prioritize strong digital communication supported by targeted advertising and clear visitor-facing information.

Digital efforts should focus on building destination awareness, promoting seasonal campaigns, supporting local events, and creating easy pathways for visitors to plan their trips. These efforts must remain consistent, visually compelling, and aligned with the County's overall brand messaging.

### **TARGETED PAID META ADVERTISING:**

Targeted paid advertising campaigns will allow Apache County to reach specific visitor segments with greater precision and stronger return on investment than traditional advertising methods. Meta advertising (Facebook and Instagram), Google advertising, and seasonal retargeting campaigns should be prioritized to reach travelers in Arizona, New Mexico, and surrounding regional markets.

Campaigns should focus on high-value tourism drivers such as fishing and hunting seasons, summer climate escape travel, family festivals, rodeos, outdoor recreation weekends, heritage tourism, and winter recreation opportunities. Paid advertising should also support major event growth by increasing attendance and improving overnight visitor retention.

These campaigns will be continuously measured through performance analytics, audience engagement, website traffic, and visitor response. This data-driven approach allows marketing dollars to be spent more efficiently while helping the County refine messaging and target the audiences most likely to visit and spend locally.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA:**

Social media will function as a primary communication and storytelling platform for Apache County tourism. Regular posting should highlight outdoor recreation, seasonal experiences, local events, heritage attractions, small businesses, and authentic visitor experiences that reflect the real character of the County.

Content should focus heavily on storytelling rather than simple promotion, showcasing local people, family traditions, community events, and scenic experiences that create emotional connection and destination appeal. Reels, short-form video, event highlights, visitor testimonials, and behind-the-scenes content can all help build stronger engagement and wider reach.

Community participation should also be encouraged through user-generated content, local business partnerships, and shared promotional efforts. When visitors and residents become part of the storytelling process, tourism messaging becomes more trusted, more visible, and more impactful across regional audiences.

### **WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION:**

Apache County's tourism website must function as both a marketing tool and a visitor planning resource. The website should clearly communicate why visitors should choose Apache County while making it easy to plan trips, discover attractions, and connect with local businesses.

Website improvements should include stronger storytelling through photography, featured itineraries, and destination guides that encourage longer stays. Visitors should be able to easily find information related to lodging, dining, outdoor recreation, events, family activities, and major attractions such as Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Petrified Forest National Park, and local community events.

Wayfinding and user experience should be a major priority, ensuring that visitors can quickly navigate the site and understand how to move throughout the County. Seasonal landing pages, event calendars, trip planning guides, and local business directories should be consistently updated to improve both visitor experience and search engine performance.

A strong tourism website supports every other marketing initiative by serving as the central destination for information, trip conversion, and long-term visitor engagement.

Events and festivals are one of the strongest and fastest opportunities for Apache County to increase tourism-related spending, strengthen community pride, and encourage repeat visitation. Community feedback consistently identified local events as some of the County's most valuable tourism assets, with rodeos, fairs, parades, car shows, holiday celebrations, and outdoor recreation events serving as major gathering points for both residents and visitors.

Because Apache County already attracts strong regional attendance for many of these events, the opportunity is not simply to create new events, but to improve the visibility, experience, and economic impact of what already exists. Strategic event planning allows the County to convert short-term visits into overnight stays while creating stronger support for local businesses, vendors, and community organizations.

Events also provide one of the most effective ways to introduce visitors to the County's culture, landscapes, and hospitality. When paired with strong marketing and community partnerships, they become a direct driver of tourism growth and long-term destination loyalty.

### **EXPAND EXISTING EVENTS:**

Existing events such as the Apache County Fair, local rodeos, parades, car shows, Pioneer Days, holiday festivals, veterans celebrations, Fourth of July events, and community gatherings should be strengthened through improved promotion, stronger partnerships, and enhanced visitor experiences. Events like Rib Throw Down, Alpine and Lyman Lake car shows, Eagar Days, and longstanding parade traditions already provide strong foundations for tourism growth.

Improving these events may include stronger digital marketing campaigns, better signage and wayfinding, improved vendor participation, sponsorship development, coordinated lodging partnerships, and expanded entertainment offerings that encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more locally. Rather than building entirely new tourism products from the ground up, expanding successful existing events provides a faster and more cost-effective path to measurable economic impact.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF NEW EVENTS:**

While strengthening current events should remain a priority, Apache County also has significant opportunities to develop new events that align with its strongest target audiences and help address seasonal tourism gaps.

New event opportunities may include fishing tournaments, hunting expos, outdoor recreation weekends, trail and OHV events, fly fishing festivals, dark sky and stargazing weekends, winter festivals, heritage celebrations, Native cultural events, agricultural showcases, and family-focused outdoor adventure weekends. These events can help position Apache County as more than a pass-through destination by giving visitors a clear reason to plan dedicated trips.

Winter-focused events are especially important, as they help reduce seasonality and create economic activity during slower visitation periods. Event development should prioritize experiences that feel authentic to the County's identity rather than events that feel forced or disconnected from the community.

## **YEAR-ROUND EVENTS CALENDAR:**

A consistent and well-communicated year-round event calendar is essential for creating predictable tourism patterns and sustained economic activity. Rather than relying heavily on a few major summer events, Apache County should strategically build an annual rhythm of events that supports visitation across all seasons.

This calendar should include major anchor events, recurring seasonal festivals, outdoor recreation weekends, family events, holiday celebrations, and regional sporting opportunities. By spacing events strategically throughout the year, the County can create more stable business support for hotels, restaurants, retailers, and service providers.

The event calendar should be promoted through the County website, social media, regional partnerships, local business collaborations, and targeted advertising campaigns. A strong annual calendar helps visitors plan in advance, increases overnight stays, and strengthens Apache County's identity as a destination with something happening year-round rather than only during peak summer months.

## **Community Partnerships**

### **LOCAL BUSINESSES:**

Collaboration among local businesses will be encouraged to create unified visitor experiences, stronger cross-promotional opportunities, and more cohesive tourism offerings throughout the County. Tourism growth benefits multiple industries, including lodging, restaurants, retail, recreation, agriculture, arts, and local services, and business owners play a direct role in shaping how visitors experience Apache County.

Partnerships between hotels, RV parks, campgrounds, restaurants, outfitters, local shops, and event organizers can create stronger visitor packages, shared marketing efforts, and destination-wide messaging that encourages longer stays and increased spending. For example, lodging providers can partner with fishing guides, rodeos, or local events to offer weekend packages, while restaurants and retailers can participate in seasonal campaigns tied to festivals or outdoor recreation.

Supporting local businesses through tourism marketing also helps ensure that economic benefits remain within the community. By strengthening collaboration and creating a more unified visitor experience, Apache County can improve both visitor satisfaction and long-term economic resilience.

### **VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT:**

Volunteer engagement is one of the most valuable and often underutilized assets in rural tourism development. Apache County has strong community pride, deep-rooted traditions, and residents who care deeply about preserving the quality of life and identity of their towns. Creating structured opportunities for residents to participate in tourism initiatives helps build trust and strengthens community ownership of the tourism process.

Volunteer-driven programs can support event operations, visitor welcome efforts, beautification projects, downtown improvements, trail maintenance, local festivals, and seasonal celebrations. Residents can also serve as community ambassadors who help visitors feel welcomed while sharing the stories and traditions that make Apache County unique.

These programs not only improve the visitor experience but also foster local pride and stronger civic engagement. When residents are involved in tourism planning and execution, tourism becomes a reflection of the community rather than an outside initiative.

**REGIONAL COLLABORATION:**

Apache County will work with surrounding regions and neighboring tourism destinations to position itself within a broader travel experience while emphasizing the value of staying locally. Many visitors already travel to the region for major attractions such as Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Petrified Forest National Park, Sunrise Park Resort, and White Mountains recreation. The opportunity is to better connect Apache County communities to these existing travel patterns and convert pass-through traffic into overnight stays and local spending.

Regional collaboration should include partnerships with neighboring counties, tribal communities, tourism organizations, chambers of commerce, and destination marketing groups to create shared promotion and stronger travel itineraries. This may include cooperative marketing campaigns, regional event promotion, visitor guides, and cross-community tourism packages that encourage multi-day travel experiences.

By positioning Apache County as both a destination and a strategic home base for broader regional exploration, the County can strengthen tourism without competing against neighboring communities. This collaborative approach builds regional trust while increasing local economic impact across Apache County.



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**TOURISM MARKETING  
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

**PHASE 1**



# PHASE 1

Based on strong community feedback and stakeholder discussions, there is a clear need for tourism growth in Apache County to happen at a sustainable and intentional pace. Residents consistently emphasized the importance of avoiding overdevelopment, protecting natural resources, preserving small-town values, and ensuring that tourism growth benefits local communities first. Because of this, the initial phase of implementation should focus heavily on strategic development, foundational infrastructure, and partnership-building before aggressively scaling visitor traffic.

Apache County already has significant destination assets, including nationally recognized landmarks, outdoor recreation opportunities, cultural heritage attractions, and established community events. However, the County's greatest opportunity lies in converting existing visitor traffic into longer stays and stronger local spending. This requires a strong foundation of branding, media development, digital communication, and community partnerships before broader expansion efforts begin.

It is recommended that Apache County engage a third-party tourism marketing firm to support strategic development, campaign execution, media production, and long-term implementation. A Request for Proposals (RFP) should be developed to identify a qualified partner that aligns with the County's goals, values, and long-term tourism vision.

This phase should be fully implemented within the first two years.

## INITIAL HANDS-ON FOCUS POINTS:

### MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

A comprehensive media package should be developed to showcase the beauty, attractions, activities, people, and stories that define Apache County. This will involve professional photography, videography, drone footage, and short-form content creation designed to bring the County's tourism identity to life through compelling visual storytelling. **Initial focal points should include:**

#### Natural Beauty & Scenic Landscapes

Lakes, forests, mesas, canyons, cliffs, volcanic fields, dark sky opportunities, and scenic drives.

#### Major Destination Anchors

Petrified Forest National Park, Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Monument Valley Tribal Park, Hubbell Trading Post, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, and White Mountains access.

#### Outdoor Recreation

Fishing, hunting, fly fishing, hiking, camping, OHV riding, boating, wildlife experiences, and seasonal recreation.

#### Community Events & Traditions

Rodeos, county fairs, parades, festivals, car shows, holiday celebrations, and family gatherings.

#### Small-Town Character

Local businesses, historic downtowns, agriculture, ranching culture, Native heritage, and authentic community life.

This foundational media bank will support all tourism marketing efforts for years to come, including digital campaigns, website development, print collateral, and regional partnerships. Continued content collection should remain ongoing to ensure relevance and freshness.

## **DIGITAL ADVERTISING & COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS**

Strong digital communication will serve as the primary tool for increasing tourism awareness and converting visitors into overnight stays and local spending. **Initial focus areas include:**

### **Unpaid Social Media Presence**

Consistent posting across County-managed platforms that highlights events, outdoor recreation, local businesses, family experiences, and destination storytelling. Social media should prioritize authentic storytelling over simple promotion.

### **Targeted Paid META Advertising**

Strategic paid campaigns through Facebook and Instagram should target Arizona, New Mexico, and neighboring regional markets. Campaigns should focus on fishing and hunting seasons, summer escape travel, family events, festivals, and winter visitation opportunities.

### **Google Advertising & Search Visibility**

Google campaigns should support major tourism searches related to outdoor recreation, attractions, and seasonal events while strengthening visibility for Apache County tourism opportunities.

### **Development & Optimization of Communication Platforms**

Identify missing or underutilized communication platforms that improve visitor access to information, trip planning, and local business promotion.

### **Website Storytelling & Wayfinding**

The County's tourism website should be strengthened to improve trip planning, event visibility, itineraries, local business directories, and destination storytelling that encourages longer stays. Digital efforts should remain data-driven, allowing the County to measure visitor response, improve campaign performance, and maximize the return on marketing investment.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Building strong and consistent community partnerships will be essential to the long-term success of Apache County's tourism strategy. Local ownership of tourism efforts creates stronger community trust, better visitor experiences, and more sustainable economic growth. Initial key partnerships include:

### **Local Business Owners**

Hotels, RV parks, campgrounds, restaurants, outfitters, retailers, and event organizers should work together to create stronger visitor experiences, cross-promotional opportunities, and tourism packages that increase local spending.

### **Volunteer Groups & Community Champions**

Residents who are passionate about their communities can support tourism through event operations, beautification efforts, local festivals, visitor engagement, and destination storytelling. Volunteer-driven efforts help strengthen both tourism and community pride.

### **Local Artists, Heritage Groups & Tribal Partners**

Native communities, artists, museums, historical organizations, and cultural leaders should be actively involved in tourism planning to ensure authenticity, preservation, and stronger cultural storytelling.

### **Regional Tourism Partners**

Collaboration with neighboring counties, tribal communities, chambers of commerce, and destination marketing organizations will help position Apache County as both a destination and a regional home base for broader exploration.

These partnerships should be built through clear communication, regular collaboration, and shared ownership of tourism outcomes.

## **EVENTS & FESTIVAL FOUNDATION BUILDING**

Because events are one of Apache County's fastest opportunities for economic impact, Phase 1 should prioritize strengthening existing events before launching major new initiatives.

Initial efforts should include:

### **Evaluation of Existing Events**

Review current fairs, rodeos, festivals, car shows, parades, and seasonal events to identify opportunities for stronger marketing, improved visitor experience, and expanded economic impact.

### **Annual Event Calendar Development**

Create a clear year-round calendar of anchor events that supports all-season visitation and stronger planning for visitors and local businesses.

### **Event Marketing Support**

Develop stronger event branding, promotional campaigns, sponsorship opportunities, and lodging coordination to encourage longer stays and larger attendance.

### **Community-Led Event Support**

Encourage community-led events and provide support through logistics, promotion, and partnership coordination to strengthen local ownership and participation.

Phase 1 event efforts should focus on strengthening what already works before expanding into larger destination-scale events in Phase 2.



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## **TOURISM MARKETING IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

# **PHASE 2**

## PHASE 2

Phase 2 will build upon the strong foundation established in Phase 1 by expanding existing tourism initiatives and focusing on long-term growth opportunities that increase overnight visitation, strengthen regional positioning, and improve the overall visitor experience across Apache County. Once branding, media development, digital communication, and key community partnerships are firmly in place, the County will be positioned to pursue larger-scale tourism development efforts with greater confidence and measurable impact.

Community feedback consistently emphasized the importance of growing tourism in a way that supports residents first while preserving the County's natural beauty, cultural identity, and rural character. Because of this, Phase 2 should remain focused on strategic expansion rather than rapid growth. The goal is not simply to attract more visitors, but to create stronger economic impact through longer stays, higher visitor spending, and improved tourism infrastructure that benefits both residents and travelers.

This phase will focus heavily on event growth, regional partnerships, destination development, and infrastructure improvements that strengthen Apache County's position as a premier destination for outdoor recreation, heritage tourism, and authentic Arizona experiences.

This phase should be implemented within two to three years following Phase 1.

### PHASE 2 FOCUS AREAS

#### Events & Festival Expansion

Once the foundation for event marketing and annual planning is established in Phase 1, Phase 2 should focus on growing the scale, reach, and economic impact of Apache County's strongest events. Existing events such as the Apache County Fair, rodeos, holiday festivals, car shows, parades, and community celebrations should be evaluated for opportunities to increase attendance, strengthen partnerships, and improve overnight visitor retention.

Priority should be placed on expanding destination-worthy events that attract regional and out-of-area visitors, such as outdoor recreation weekends, fishing tournaments, hunting expos, fly fishing festivals, agricultural showcases, Native cultural celebrations, winter festivals, and dark sky or stargazing events. These events should be designed to align with the County's strongest target audiences and create clear reasons for visitors to plan dedicated trips rather than short visits.

Volunteer groups, business owners, and community organizations should remain heavily involved in the planning and execution of these events to ensure local ownership and stronger economic impact. Once a reliable annual event calendar is established, the media assets and digital strategies created in Phase 1 should be used to launch larger destination marketing campaigns around these anchor events.

#### Strategic Regional Partnerships

Apache County already benefits from proximity to some of the Southwest's most recognized tourism destinations, including Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Petrified Forest National Park, Sunrise Park Resort, and the White Mountains recreation region. Phase 2 should focus on strengthening regional partnerships that position Apache County as both a destination and a strategic home base for broader travel experiences.

Collaboration with neighboring counties, tribal tourism leaders, destination marketing organizations, chambers of commerce, and state tourism partners will help create stronger shared marketing efforts and multi-day visitor itineraries. Visitors who come for major attractions should be encouraged to stay longer by exploring surrounding communities, local businesses, events, and recreation opportunities throughout Apache County.

These partnerships may include cooperative visitor guides, regional event promotion, lodging partnerships, shared campaign development, and attendance at tourism conferences and networking opportunities. Building regional trust ensures tourism growth strengthens the entire region rather than creating unnecessary competition between neighboring communities.

### **Community Development & Visitor Experience Improvements**

As tourism awareness grows and visitor demand increases, long-term community development efforts should continue to improve the overall visitor experience while also enhancing quality of life for residents. These improvements should focus on the areas most frequently identified through stakeholder feedback, including downtown activation, wayfinding, public amenities, and outdoor recreation access.

Key development priorities include improving signage and navigation throughout the County, strengthening access to major attractions and hidden gems, improving downtown visitor experiences, expanding public gathering spaces, and enhancing community event venues. Investments in public restrooms, parking, trail connectivity, and family-friendly recreation spaces can significantly improve both visitor satisfaction and resident use.

Beautification projects, public art, local heritage displays, and stronger destination signage can also help create a stronger sense of place and reinforce Apache County's tourism identity throughout its communities.

### **Lodging, Dining & Tourism Business Development**

One of the largest barriers to tourism growth identified by stakeholders is the limited availability of lodging, dining, and visitor-serving businesses. Phase 2 should include intentional efforts to attract and support businesses that directly strengthen tourism infrastructure and improve visitor retention.

This includes encouraging additional hotel development, RV parks, campgrounds, cabins, family-friendly lodging, and short-term rental opportunities that align with the County's tourism goals. Restaurant growth, local dining experiences, farm-to-table concepts, breweries, wineries, and food-focused tourism opportunities should also be prioritized to increase visitor spending and improve destination appeal.

Outdoor recreation rentals, guide services, sporting goods support, and adventure tourism businesses represent another major opportunity for growth. Supporting these sectors helps ensure that Apache County's natural assets translate into stronger local economic benefit rather than visitors simply passing through.

## **Long-Term Destination Positioning**

As tourism efforts mature, Apache County should continue strengthening its long-term destination identity as Arizona's authentic escape, where visitors can experience nationally recognized landscapes, cultural heritage, outdoor adventure, and genuine small-town hospitality.

This includes continued investment in storytelling, media development, visitor education, tourism branding, and destination management practices that preserve the County's authenticity while supporting sustainable growth. Tourism should remain community-led, values-driven, and focused on quality over quantity.

The long-term success of Phase 2 depends on maintaining the balance between economic opportunity and community preservation. By growing intentionally and building from local strengths, Apache County can establish itself as a destination where visitors stay longer, spend more, and return often, while residents continue to feel proud of the place they call home.



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# BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS



## BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Apache County engage a third-party tourism marketing firm to support the strategic development, implementation, and long-term management of tourism initiatives identified throughout this five-year Tourism Marketing Plan. A Request for Proposals (RFP) should be developed and released to identify a qualified firm that aligns with the County's goals, values, and long-term vision for sustainable tourism growth.

Because Apache County's tourism strategy relies heavily on destination storytelling, community partnerships, event growth, and visitor conversion rather than large-scale traditional advertising, marketing investments should prioritize high-quality media development, targeted digital campaigns, website optimization, and strong campaign management that directly support measurable tourism outcomes.

The following budget recommendations are based on estimated market pricing for ongoing tourism marketing services and are designed to support a strategic, phased implementation approach. It is recommended that Apache County maintain an annual tourism marketing budget between \$40,000 and \$60,000 to effectively support this five-year plan while allowing for sustainable growth and careful investment.

### **Media Development** – \$15,000 to \$18,000

A strong media foundation is essential for all tourism marketing efforts. Apache County should invest in the creation and ongoing expansion of a professional content library that showcases the County's landscapes, outdoor recreation, community events, local businesses, and authentic visitor experiences.

This includes professional photography, long-form promotional videos, short-form social media video content, drone footage, editing, music licensing, and voiceover production. Seasonal media collection should occur strategically throughout the year, with major content sessions prioritized around peak tourism seasons and anchor events.

Because this content supports every marketing initiative—from digital ads to website storytelling to regional partnerships—media development should remain one of the highest early investment priorities.

### **Advertisement Management** – \$8,000 to \$10,000

Strategic advertisement management ensures that tourism campaigns are properly planned, executed, and optimized for maximum return on investment. This includes ad creative development, copywriting, campaign strategy, audience targeting, monthly reporting, and ongoing optimization.

Campaigns should focus on major tourism drivers such as fishing and hunting seasons, summer climate escape travel, rodeos, festivals, family events, and winter recreation opportunities. Meta advertising (Facebook and Instagram) and Google advertising should remain the primary focus due to their targeting precision and measurable results. Ongoing management allows the County to make data-driven decisions and continuously improve campaign performance over time.

### **Paid Advertising (Targeted Ad Spend) – \$7,000 to \$10,000**

Dedicated ad spend within Meta, Google, and retargeting platforms is necessary to reach Apache County’s desired visitor segments and increase tourism visibility across Arizona, New Mexico, and surrounding regional markets.

Paid advertising should be deployed strategically around seasonal campaigns, major events, and high-value visitor opportunities. This includes audience segmentation, retargeting campaigns, seasonal boosts, and brand awareness efforts designed to convert awareness into trip planning and overnight stays.

Unlike traditional print or radio advertising, targeted digital advertising allows Apache County to track results in real time, ensuring that every dollar spent is measurable and aligned with visitor response.

### **Campaign Management – \$5,000 to \$8,000**

Tourism growth requires more than isolated advertising efforts—it requires coordinated campaigns that connect attractions, businesses, events, and seasonal opportunities into compelling visitor experiences.

Campaign management includes the development of themed campaigns such as outdoor recreation weekends, heritage tourism promotions, family festival weekends, dark sky tourism, hunting and fishing seasons, and seasonal destination guides. These campaigns may also include landing page development, itineraries, partner toolkits, print collateral, and visitor-facing promotional materials. Strong campaign management ensures all tourism efforts feel connected, strategic, and aligned with Apache County’s long-term destination positioning.

### **Website Management – \$4,000 to \$7,000**

Apache County’s tourism website must function as both a destination marketing platform and a trip planning tool. Ongoing website management ensures the site remains updated, visually strong, and aligned with active campaigns and visitor needs.

This includes homepage and landing page updates, event calendar maintenance, local business directories, itinerary development, blog content, SEO improvements, and technical maintenance.

Because the website serves as the central conversion point for tourism marketing efforts, maintaining a strong visitor-facing digital experience is critical to long-term success.

### **Graphic Design – \$2,000 to \$4,000**

Strong, cohesive visual design supports all tourism marketing efforts and helps reinforce Apache County’s destination identity across digital and print platforms.

This includes social media graphics, event promotion materials, visitor guides, maps, signage concepts, brochures, merchandise design, local business templates, sponsorship packets, and campaign branding materials. Professional design improves marketing effectiveness, strengthens consistency, and helps create a more polished and recognizable destination brand.

## LONG-TERM INVESTMENT PERSPECTIVE

Targeted digital marketing offers significant advantages over traditional advertising methods such as print, radio, and billboards. Rather than broad, untargeted messaging, digital platforms allow Apache County to reach specific audiences based on demographics, travel intent, interests, and behavior.

This precision improves return on investment, provides real-time analytics, and allows campaigns to be adjusted quickly based on performance. For a rural destination like Apache County—where visitor conversion and overnight stays matter more than broad awareness alone—this strategy ensures tourism dollars work harder and produce stronger long-term results.

Investing in strategic tourism marketing is not simply a promotional expense; it is an economic development tool that supports local businesses, strengthens community infrastructure, and creates sustainable growth opportunities for the County as a whole.

## KEY STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS

Apache County's tourism strategy should prioritize sustainable, community-aligned growth that strengthens the local economy while protecting the values, landscapes, and traditions that make the region unique. Community feedback consistently emphasized the importance of preserving the County's small-town character, natural beauty, and cultural identity, ensuring that tourism growth benefits residents first.

Marketing efforts must also align with infrastructure readiness. Tourism promotion should grow alongside improvements in lodging, dining, signage, connectivity, and visitor amenities to ensure visitors have a positive experience and communities are prepared for growth.

Above all, Apache County must preserve the identity that makes it special. Its authenticity, slower pace of life, cultural heritage, outdoor access, and strong sense of community are its greatest strengths. Tourism should serve as a tool for economic development and community enhancement—not a force that changes what residents value most.



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