

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2022

Here are a few highlights from our 2022 Business Plan to grow tourism and improve our community:



Yakima Valley Tourism
10 North 8th St. • Yakima, WA 98901
509.575.3010 • VisitYakima.com



COMMUNITY & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- Continue work with local, state and other officials and organizations in community-building efforts.
- Advocate for funds to assist in community and business development.
- Develop new tourism products and opportunities in the Yakima Valley.
- Build awareness of tourism's value to the public and political leaders.
- Continue to produce videos on public access TV and Yakima Valley Tourism's YouTube page.

YAKIMA CONVENTION CENTER

- Showcase 18,300-square-foot expansion.
- Utilize the Bring It Home website to assist local planners in bringing events to town.
- Pursue capital projects for the Yakima Convention Center including rest room and audiovisual upgrades, new roof on older sections of building, increased parking and headquarter hotel needs.
- Maximize Convention Center use to meet budgeted income and expenses.
- Continue staff training to ensure guest safety for COVID-19 compliance.

CONVENTION & GROUP SALES

- Generate 80-100 group sales leads and book up to 15,000 future room nights.
- Work with the Yakima Convention Center to pursue conventions that meet criteria for the expanded Center and other facilities.
- Attract planners to the region for site tours and training.

VISITOR SERVICES

- Provide exceptional customer service at the VIC.
- Develop ways to bring new visitors and locals into the VIC. Encourage travelers to extend their stay.
- Assess the long-term needs for VIC services and location.
- Get the Mobile Info Center Kiosk (M.I.C.K.) out in the community at events and businesses.

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

- Attract new sporting events to local venues.
- Assist local groups in developing existing and new sports facilities.
- Continue to build awareness of the YVSC and the benefits of sporting events.
- Build relationships with local sporting organizations, tournament directors and venues.

DESTINATION MARKETING

- Continue to elevate the Yakima Valley as an attractive place for safe travel through cohesive marketing strategies and brand messages.
- Develop strategic advertising that attracts year-round visitors.
- Remain the leader in tourism web-based and social media promotion for the Yakima Valley.
- Identify and implement new technology solutions for promoting the region.

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

- Provide support and services to members, helping to rebuild their business.
- Build membership to 338 members and sustain a high level of retention.
- Create and distribute an exceptional 2022 Official Yakima Valley Travel Guide™.
- Develop new programs to boost business for members and the community.

MEDIA & TRADE RELATIONS

- Make media sales calls and pitches to publishers, writers and bloggers.
- Secure travel and lifestyle features in a variety of media outlets.
- Develop or support niche products and services that attract and assist visitors.
- Attend industry trade shows, showcasing key attractions and events to attract visitors.



2021 YAKIMA VALLEY TOURISM
**ANNUAL
REPORT**

MOVING FORWARD

2021 was a year of adaptation and recovery because of the COVID pandemic and social changes. Working with our partners and businesses we continued our mission to rebuild the tourism economy while serving our residents.



Meghann Quinn
2021 Board Chair



John Cooper
President & CEO

10%

INCREASE IN TOTAL ROOMS SOLD OVER PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS OF 2019 

We project that when all the 2021 data arrives, we'll see growth in these numbers, reaching near pre-pandemic 2019 levels. The good news is hotel/motel occupancy rebounded. **After falling 35% in 2020, in 2021, Yakima lodging occupancies returned to 2019 levels and the total rooms sold increased by nearly 10%** (Smith Travel Research).

Beyond the numbers, tourism supports small businesses, improves our quality of life and provides funds for public services we all enjoy like parks, public safety, roads and social services.

Tourism is a vital industry for our region and plays a key role in community development. Even in the pandemic year of 2020:

\$245

MILLION DOLLARS SPENT

Travelers spent \$245 million in Yakima County

\$440

MILLION DOLLARS IN TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

4,119

VISITOR SUPPORTED JOBS FOR OUR RESIDENTS

\$34

MILLION DOLLARS IN STATE AND LOCAL TAX REVENUE GENERATED

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

At the end of the year, 297 businesses and organizations were members of Yakima Valley Tourism. These partners received many benefits to help them regrow their business and create jobs. As pandemic restrictions eased and visitor traffic increased we were able to reinstate more of our marketing and business development programs. Some of those included a free workshop with Google & Miles Partnership, travel guide deliveries to members, Timely Talks online sessions and more.

“

We are so grateful to have Yakima Valley Tourism as a community partner. They know us and our brand and accurately represent us to Washington wine visitors and beyond. As our wine industry is a global one, we have been grateful for the connections we have made.

Susan Brown-Aaron
Owen Roe

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297

YAKIMA VALLEY TOURISM MEMBERS

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN A TIME OF NEED

Forty-four e-newsletters informed members of news related to COVID-19, marketing and sales tips and opportunities. The popular Yakima Valley Official Travel Guide™ will return in 2022 with new advertisements, refreshed text and photos. In addition, staff worked with members on marketing opportunities via online advertising on our award-winning website plus the Yakima Valley, Craft Beverage and Farm Fresh Fun maps.

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER

Our top-rated Visitor Information Center (VIC) is the go-to place for Yakima Valley visitors and locals. With COVID pandemic related slowdowns in travel, the VIC continually adapted to serve the community in new and dynamic ways. The center was open to the public in some capacity all year, with limited hours through June, and then open four days a week with more hours through December. Because of these increased hours, the center served **2,930 walk-in visitors (double 2020 visitors served)** and **responded to 5,417 inquiries** via postal mail, phone and email.



In spring, the VIC was the site for mask and PPE giveaways as Yakima Valley Tourism joined with community groups to help keep the Valley open and safe. Partnering with the health department, the VIC hosted vaccination clinics through the summer. As travelers returned, the VIC was ready to explain state or county health protocols and provide information on member businesses. In November the VIC launched an online retail store selling our gift baskets locally and across the country.

YAKIMA VALLEY SPORTS COMMISSION

Sports tourism is crucial in the Yakima Valley, providing significant economic benefit and exposure for our community. The Yakima Valley Sports Commission works to enhance existing sporting events, attract new events and promote the region as the premier sports destination in the Pacific Northwest.

 **266** SPORTING
EVENTS HELD

In 2021, sports continued to be significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As conditions improved, more events were able to be held. In October, the Yakima Valley played host to the first WIAA State Championships held in over 19 months, the State Slowpitch Championships at the Gateway Sports Complex. Just two weeks later, our community hosted all six WIAA State Volleyball Championships in the Yakima Valley SunDome. For the year, the Yakima Valley hosted **266 sporting events**, up 100% from 2020. These events brought in **32,413 room nights** with an **estimated economic impact of \$21,280,532 million**.

\$21,280,532
ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SPORTING EVENTS

Our community is fortunate to host several WIAA State Championships each school year. The Sports Commission has a strong relationship with the WIAA, and staff will continue their efforts to bring additional WIAA State Championships to the Yakima Valley, including but not limited to soccer, cross country, wrestling, track & field, and golf.



SIGNATURE EVENTS

The Sports Commission annually hosts four signature sporting events to bring visitors to the Yakima Valley and to serve the residents of our community. For the first time since 2019, all four events were held in person: The Yakima Valley Sports Awards, the Hot Shots 3-On-3 Basketball Tourney, the Dye Hard 5K and the SunDome Volleyball Festival. In addition, the Commission developed and partnered with local organizations four other events including the Super 5K, the Duel in The Desert Lacrosse Tourney, the Bubbles and Brews 5K and the Mud, Sweat and Beers 5K.

 **32,413**
ROOM NIGHTS BROUGHT IN BY SPORTING EVENTS

YAKIMA CONVENTION CENTER

The Yakima Convention Center is the premier meeting and events facility and generates significant economic activity for Yakima.

2021 was a celebration for the Center as we finished the 18,000 square foot expansion. Also, we were able to welcome back dozens of groups from corporate board meetings to a state convention of more than 1,600 farmers. The Yakima Convention Center is now the **fourth largest convention and event center in Washington State**. The Grand Hall grew to 30,264 square feet and can seat up to 2,000 people for a banquet. Three new breakout rooms feature glass walls that can open to a spacious new lobby. A grand entrance finishes off the lobby with a spectacular lighted tiled wall and skylight.

The new addition allows us to host more people socially distanced than most of our competition. It will also help keep events that were outgrowing the facility and host multiple functions at one time.

69%
INCREASE IN EVENT
DAYS HELD (275)

60%
INCREASE IN FUTURE
DAYS BOOKED (408)

GBAC STAR ACCREDITATION

After months of work, the Yakima Convention Center achieved the Global Biorisk Advisory Council's (GBAC) STAR Facility Accreditation. This accreditation shows that the Center has established and maintains a certified cleaning, disinfection and infectious disease prevention program with well-trained professionals and cleaning processes in place.



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It felt like a leap of faith to have a conference in these times. However, the Yakima Convention Center partnered with our organization to make the event safe and successful. From their safety plan to their excellent care of the facility and guests, we were able to feel confident in their management of the event. Our members thoroughly enjoyed the experience and the opportunity to come together again.

Katie Granado
Washington Association of Maintenance
and Operation Administrators

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CONVENTION & GROUP SALES

A major charge for Yakima Valley Tourism is to recruit conventions and groups to our community and to serve their needs.

16,023  **FUTURE HOTEL ROOM NIGHT LEADS**
Nearly double what was produced in 2020

With COVID-19 restrictions limiting events, plus the construction of the Convention Center expansion for much of the year, 2021 was a difficult year for groups. Although cancellations were occurring, interest in holding future dates grew and the Sales Department was able to generate more leads. With the completion of the Center expansion, both the Convention Sales and the Yakima Convention Center team invited and toured dozens of meeting planners to bring their events to Yakima.

32
FUTURE CONFERENCE LEADS CONFIRMED

43
FUTURE EVENT DATES BOOKED

The first conference held since March 2020 was a new piece of business for Yakima. The First Responders Conference was held in June at the Center. That was followed by five other large conferences. The year closed with the WA State Tree Fruit Association holding their 1,600 person conference and tradeshow. 2022 is looking promising as people are getting more comfortable with gathering in large groups.

MEDIA & TRAVEL TRADE

Yakima Valley Tourism invites and hosts travel and trade representatives for tours of Yakima and the Yakima Valley. While group visits were largely on hold due to the pandemic, we hosted several individual travel writers and social media influencers who explored beer and wine country, the outdoors and farm fresh experiences. We secured media coverage through staff outreach, our public relations firm and from past media visits and are working towards returning to in-person trade shows.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Our efforts continued to garner positive media coverage for the region, resulting in more than **105 published features and 143 million in circulation and views** about Yakima and the Yakima Valley in print, broadcast and online channels. We built new relationships with social influencers, maintained editorial partnerships to stay top-of-mind for future coverage and provided assistance, content and imagery to several writers and bloggers.

In 2021, the Yakima Valley enjoyed features in the following media and others:



105 **FEATURES IN DIGITAL & PRINT OUTLETS** | **143 MILLION** **POTENTIAL VIEWERS**

TRAVEL TRADE

While travel industry and media trade shows were still largely on hold in 2021, we look forward to in-person trade events to sell the region in 2022. These events build connections and showcase the Yakima Valley, helping secure media coverage and group travel.

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Throughout 2021, we adapted our strategies as the travel industry and our community moved through stages of recovery. Working with seven local organizations, we managed a central resource center to serve the needs of businesses, residents and travelers as COVID restrictions continued. Our efforts were sensitive to visitor and community sentiments regarding safe travel as we implemented projects to keep the Yakima Valley top of mind for both current and future travel.



A FEW OF OUR 2021 SUCCESSES:

- 2021 traffic to VisitYakima.com increased by 38%, even with restrictions in place the first half of the year. Visitor sessions were down only 14% over 2019 for the year.
- Lodging leads increased 64% over 2020 and just 34% down from 2019.
- We completed a re-design of VisitYakima.com with a planned launch in February 2022.
- YVT hosted an in-person educational session for Yakima Valley businesses with Miles Partnership to improve and enhance our Valley's presence in the Google landscape.
- We initiated new advertising partners with campaigns in key regional publications including Seattle Magazine, Seattle Metropolitan, 1889 and 425 magazines.
- An extensive, two-month digital advertising campaign for wine country and craft beer exceeded delivery by 251%.
- The refresh of our photo library is underway with photo sessions completed at several locations.



 **64%**
INCREASE IN WEBSITE LODGING LEADS

Looking forward, we're excited to launch new technology-based projects. In February we'll launch RootRez, a new lodging referral engine on VisitYakima.com. A new partnership with Datafy will provide us with rich insights into visitor traffic and behavior. We will launch a series of digital travel passports, beginning with wineries and breweries. Our expanded advertising partnerships will continue in 2022 with a blend of print and digital promotions. With Digital Vendetta we will complete an extensive series of exciting videos promoting the Yakima Valley.