VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS

Southwest Virginia:

Heart of Appalachia



STATE OF THE REGION

2024 Annual Economic Impact

Defined by dramatic mountain landscapes, an extensive trail network, distinct Appalachian heritage, and a strong sense of place rooted in coal mining, music, and artisan traditions. Visitors are drawn to its off-the-beaten-path character, abundant outdoor recreation, and authentic small-town communities.

$225.7M	1.99K	$56.4M	$6.0M	$8.8M
Total Direct Spending	Total Employment Jobs	Total Labor Income	Total State Taxes	Total Local Taxes

STRENGTHS

RECREATION & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Spearhead Trails ATV/UTV systems, multi-use trails • Breaks Interstate Park • Natural Tunnel State Park • Clinch River State Park • Wilderness Road State Park

ARTS & CULTURE

Carter Family Fold • Blue Highway Fest, Ralph Stanley Hills of Home, Clinch River Days • Culinary scene celebrating Appalachian traditions

AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE & INSPIRING PUBLIC PLACES

Historic downtowns • Preserved architecture • Pedestrian-friendly streets • Locally owned shops and eateries • Scenic winding roads and picturesque small towns

WEAKNESSES

Accessibility and connectivity • Lodging variety • Digital visibility • Wayfinding, signage, and visitor services • Perceived as remote or economically distressed

OPPORTUNITIES

RECREATION & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Trails, access points, wayfinding, and visitor-support infrastructure • Package outdoor experiences more effectively

HOTELS & HOSPITALITY

Unique stays, small-scale hotels, and experience-driven accommodations

ARTS & CULTURE | AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE & INSPIRING PUBLIC PLACES

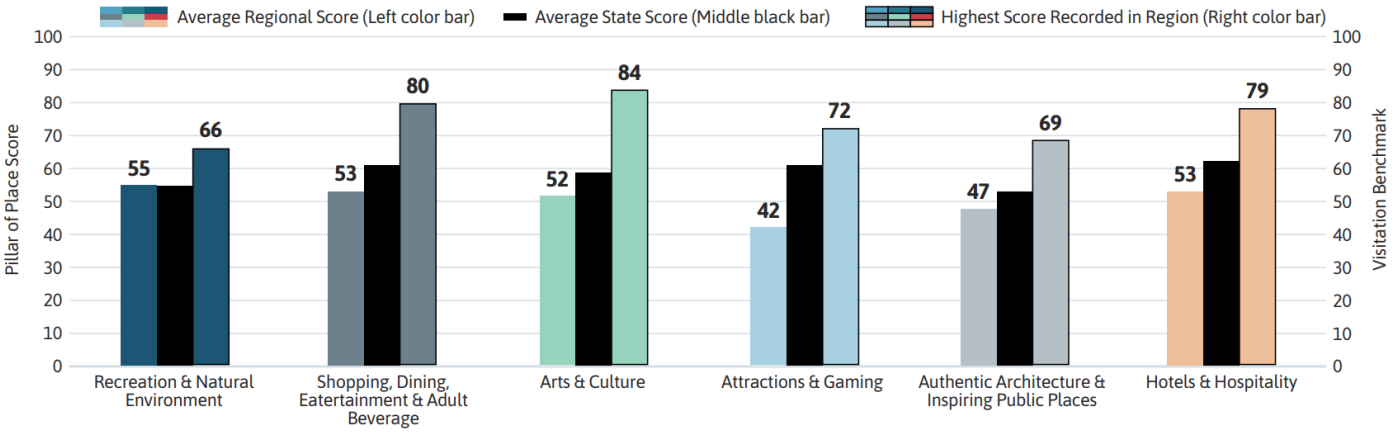
The Crooked Road and 'Round the Mountain Artisan Network • Deepen storytelling • Increase visibility • Encourage cross-community visitation • Public spaces and historic structures

THREATS

Population decline • Staffing shortages • Competition from nearby regions • Perception challenges • Cohesive messaging and modernized branding

PILLARS OF PLACE – REGIONAL ASSET PERFORMANCE

Pillars of Place Assessment | Southwest Virginia: Heart of Appalachia



Heart of Appalachia shows strength in Authentic Architecture & Public Space and Recreation & Natural Environment, while Hotels & Hospitality and Attractions & Gaming offer opportunities for investment.

VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS

SWVA: Heart of Appalachia

SCAN HERE TO ACCESS THE STP

vatc.org/STP

AUDIENCE PROFILES

J AUTUMN YEARS

Mature, long-settled couples
Value familiar, quiet routines, scenic drives, heritage and relaxed outdoor trips

Q GOLDEN YEAR GUARDIANS

Financially cautious and traditional retirees
Value community and familiarity
Prefer peaceful, comfortable experiences

L BLUE SKY BOOMERS

Traditional, practical adults in small towns and rural communities
Value affordability, familiarity and outdoor recreation
Enjoy scenic drives, nature and relaxed, accessible experiences

COMPETITORS

Eastern and Southeastern Kentucky • East Tennessee • Southern West Virginia

WHAT MAKES THE REGION UNIQUE

Tranquility, authentic Appalachian heritage, and compact mix of diverse outdoor experiences. “Undiscovered Appalachian” appeal that sets the region apart from more commercialized destinations.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

SPORTS | RECREATION & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT | ATTRACTIONS & GAMING

Prioritize outdoor sports and recreation, including trail activities, motorsports, and adventure recreation. Continue investment in trails, access points, visitor amenities, wayfinding and infrastructure. Focus on strengthening existing assets rather than pursuing stand-alone attractions.

HOTELS & HOSPITALITY

Attracting lodging investment represents one of the region’s highest priorities and greatest challenges. Attract unique and experience-driven lodging concepts, including boutique inns, cabins, glamping resorts, and adaptive reuse projects.

ENTERTAINMENT | SHOPPING, DINING, EATERTAINMENT & ADULT BEVERAGE | ARTS & CULTURE | AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE & INSPIRING PUBLIC PLACES

Leverage the region’s rich musical and cultural heritage and integrate live entertainment with local dining, craft beverage offerings, and walkable downtown environments. Take a regional approach to arts, culture, events, and future investment while preserving and celebrating the region’s historic character.

CONVENTIONS & CONFERENCES

Targeted investment in flexible, multi-use facilities can support small to mid-sized meetings, retreats, and educational programming.

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

HOTELS & HOSPITALITY

- Encourage hospitality investment and development-ready sites
- Prioritize boutique and unique lodging concepts
- Target glamping hospitality resorts

AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE & INSPIRING PUBLIC PLACES

- Direct investment into local downtowns
- Activate vacant or underutilized buildings
- Improve regional signage and wayfinding systems

RECREATION & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Strengthen the region’s identity as an outdoor destination
- Invest in existing recreational hot spots
- Enhance visitor amenities and create stronger recreation clusters