

JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

2025/2026 – Q3 REPORT

January, February, March

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Tourism performance in Jefferson County during the third quarter of FY2026 reflects continued stabilization following the impacts of Hurricane Helene, with ongoing external factors still influencing visitation and revenue trends. Year-to-date hotel occupancy tax collections total \$586,683.86, reflecting a 3.3% decrease compared to FY2024; however, more recent monthly data indicates stabilization, with January and February collections remaining nearly flat year-over-year.
- Visitor trends show a temporary decline in early 2026, with out-of-market visitation and overnight trips down compared to the same period last year. These shifts are largely attributed to continued impacts from Interstate 40 lane closures, reduced access from key markets, and broader economic conditions affecting travel behavior. Despite these challenges, marketing efforts, strategic partnerships, and event programming continue to support recovery and position Jefferson County for growth in the peak spring and summer seasons.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX

- **Final FY2025 Collections:** \$880,300.94
- **Change from FY2024:** -3.3%
This decrease is primarily attributed to the impacts of Hurricane Helene on lake-related travel and continued access limitations along Interstate 40, including lane closures affecting key inbound markets.
- **January–February 2026 Collections:** \$100,500
- **Year-over-Year Change (Jan–Feb FY2024 vs. FY2025):** -0.03%
Monthly data indicates stabilization in early 2026. Minor fluctuations may also be influenced by one major hotel undergoing renovations, with a significant portion of rooms temporarily offline.

VISITOR TRENDS (Placer.ai – 2026 YTD January – February 2026 Reporting, includes visitors who travelled 50+ miles or greater)

- **Total Trips:** 105,600
- **Visit Nights:** 125,900
- **Year-over-Year Change:** -14.5%
- **Average Nights Stayed:** 2.8
- **Top Visitor Origin Markets:** Tri-Cities/VA, Nashville, Charleston-Huntington (WV), Greenville-Spartanburg/Asheville

This decline reflects a combination of factors, including broader economic conditions, reduced long-distance travel, and continued access challenges along Interstate 40. A noticeable shift in visitor origin markets has occurred, with decreased visitation from North Carolina and South Carolina and increased reliance on Virginia and Nashville markets.

2025 Annual Overview

- **Total Trips:** 1.0 million
- **Total Visit Nights:** 1.6 million
- **Visitor Spending:** \$29.2 million
- **Change from 2024:** -0.3%

The slight annual decline is largely attributed to Hurricane Helene, Interstate 40 disruptions, and public perception regarding lake conditions following debris impacts. These factors contributed to decreased visitation during key spring and early summer months, particularly affecting fishing tournaments and lake-related activities.

EVENTS & TOURNAMENT PERFORMANCE (2026 YTD): JCTD tracks event performance using participant registrations, ticket sales, surveys, Placer.ai data, and IRS federal daily average rates for meals, incidentals, and fuel to estimate economic impact and return on investment. *Does not include data from one event that took place end of March.* [View All Upcoming Events](#)

METRIC	VALUE
Total Number of Events	3
Estimated Overall Attendance	932
Estimated Overnight Stays	15
Average Nights Stayed	0.5
Lodging Revenue	\$308,800
Total Daily Expenditures (Food, Retail, Misc.)	\$111,000
Total Number of Boats	154
Gas Expenditures (Boats Only)	\$7,700
Total Estimated Economic Impact	\$118,800.00
Estimated ROI	7.37%

MARKETING & PROMOTION HIGHLIGHTS

- **Winter & Early Spring Photoshoot:** Partnered with a local photographer to capture seasonal lake imagery for the “Two Lakes, One Destination” campaign, highlighting the unique visual appeal of winter lake conditions.
- **Lake Maps Initiative:** In collaboration with the Middle East Tennessee Tourism Council, developed new maps for Douglas and Cherokee Lakes featuring marinas, restaurants, and key visitor points of interest.
- **Website Performance:**
 - 59,000+ active users
 - Approximately 77,000 page views
 - Top pages: Lodging, Itineraries (“Your East TN Vacation”), Cabins & Cottages
- **Email Marketing:**
 - 5,792 subscribers
 - Three campaigns delivered
 - 32.46% average open rate
- **Content Development:**
 - Five blogs
 - One press release
 - One itinerary focused on spring travel
 - View all: <https://visitjeffersoncountyttn.com/lakeside-news/>

PAID MEDIA & ADVERTISING

Meta (Facebook & Instagram)

Winter Campaign (Dec 5 – Feb 28): “Restful winter retreats, close to the Smokies”

- 330,500 impressions
- 14,400 interactions
- 13,300 link clicks

Spring/Summer Campaign (March 11 – Ongoing): “Switch screens for memories,” Digital detox vacations on trend for 2026

- 65,900 impressions
- 13,800 interactions
- 5,100 link clicks

Google Ads (Search & Display)

Winter Campaign (Dec 1 – Feb 28): Winter retreats, lakeside cabins, proximity to the Smoky Mountains with less congestion

- 6.5 million impressions
- 44,100 clicks
- 171.4% conversion rate

Spring/Summer Campaign (March 11 – Ongoing): “Disconnect to Reconnect” – nature-based, family-oriented travel experiences

- 3,000 clicks
- 1.62% conversion rate

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Participated in the Granicus Host Compliance Program in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development; Jefferson County was the first county to implement this system to support short-term rental compliance and permitting.
- Partnered with the University of Tennessee Retail & Hospitality Program for a senior capstone project analyzing Jefferson County’s tourism landscape. Staff presented in February and hosted a multi-site tour for students in March.
- Attended the TWRA Black Bass Stakeholder Committee meeting in Knoxville, contributing to the development of a statewide bass management plan scheduled for implementation in 2027.
- Participated in Leadership East Tennessee programming, including a regional retreat in Sevier County and Emergency Services in Roane County Day.
- Attended Tourism Day on the Hill in Nashville with the Tennessee Hospitality & Tourism Association, meeting with state legislators to highlight tourism’s economic impact and request support and funding for tourism initiatives in this legislative session.
- Awarded a Tennessee 250 Historic Preservation Grant to enhance the Civil War Trails system in Jefferson County.
- Hosted the Bassmaster Classic Celebrity Pro-Am at the Dandridge Dock, featuring over 30 professional anglers and celebrities, including Randy Moss.
- Applied for funding through the Fish Tennessee Program to support the inaugural NPFL Military event set to take place on Douglas Lake this September.
- Supported and sponsored multiple events, including the Spirit of Nations Powwow, Vintage Base Ball Game, and B.A.I.T. High School and Youth Fishing Tournament.

Additional Reports: <https://visitjeffersoncountyttn.com/jctd-reports/>